

2923

Punyashlok

Km
15/7/80

Chhaganbapa

संस्कृत विद्यापीठ संस्कृत विद्यापीठ

987

228



MAHILA GRIHA UDYOG LIJJAT P. PAD

SOME IMPRESSIONS ABOUT CHHAGANBAPA

"Life of a great man like Late Chhagan-
Bapa serves as a beacon light to the gene-
rations to come to indicate as to how the
principle of truth can be maintained even

and as to how the manage-
2183 lly used in social

Pathab, (Ramnarayan
Nagar Das)
(D. M. Chhaganb.

work or organi-
where thousands of
as partners with

R. B. SHAH
ing Director,
mercial Bank)

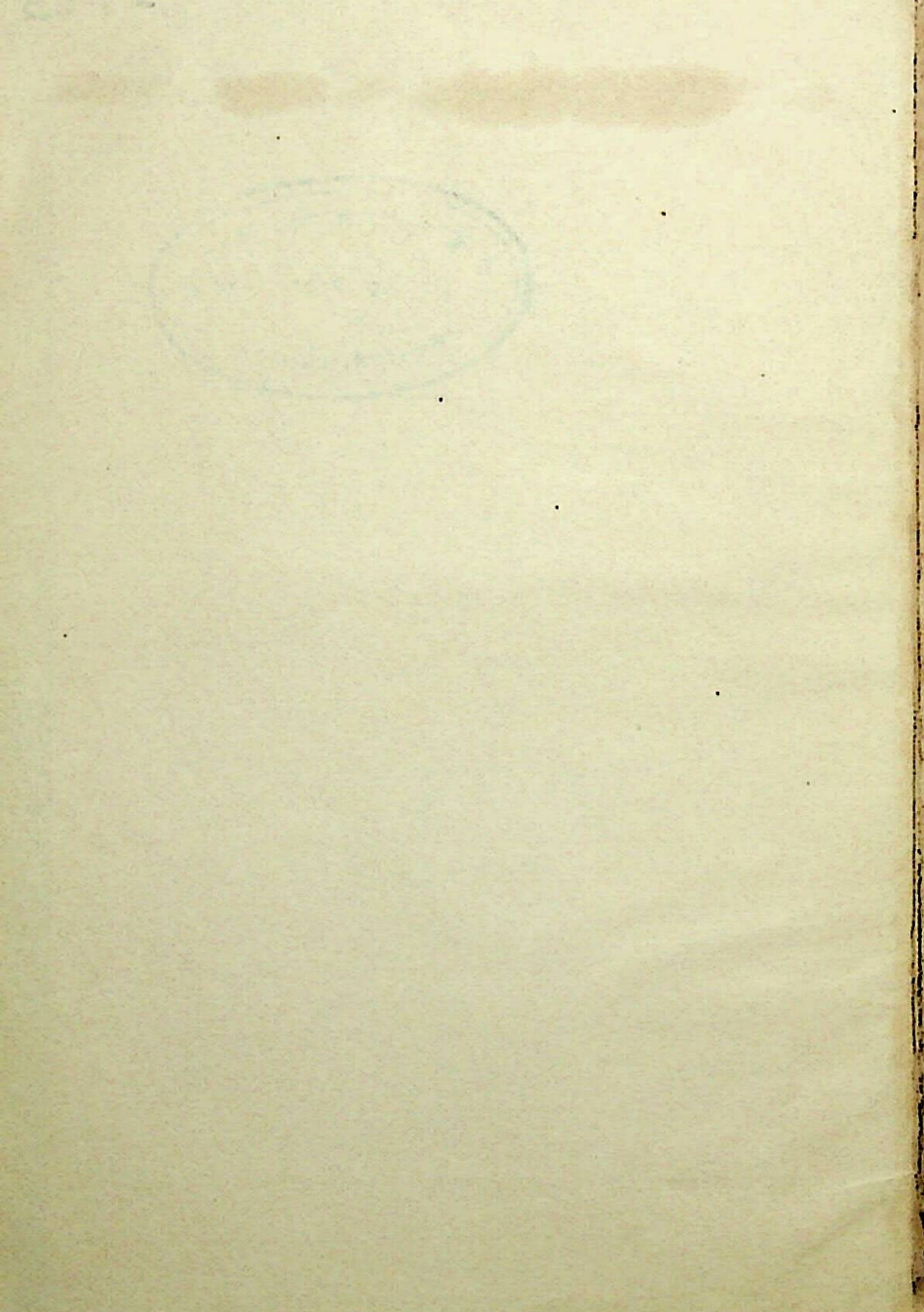
Bapa, lived an
s attained the
ur Vedas and
spiration and
ounger gene-
crifice (त्याग)
e shall always
for the entire

DJI THAKKAR
High Court)

कृपया यह ग्रन्थ नीचे निर्देशित तिथि के पूर्व अथवा उक्त तिथि तक वापस कर दें। विलम्ब से लौटाने पर प्रतिदिन दस पैसे विलम्ब शुल्क देना होगा।

[illegible]

मुमुक्षु भवन वेद वेदाङ्ग पुस्तकालय, वाराणसी ।



PUNYASHLOK
CHHAGANBAPA

TEL. 476386

SHRI MAHILA GRHA UDYOG LIJAT
PAPAD.

30/1 KALIGHAT ROAD

CALCUTTA. 700025.

BRANCHES BOMBAY - POONA - AMRAVTI -
HYDERABAD - VADOD - RAMANIA -
JABALPUR.

CHHABANATH
PUNYASHTOK

THE

CHHABANATH PUNYASHTOK

CHHABANATH PUNYASHTOK

CHHABANATH PUNYASHTOK

CHHABANATH PUNYASHTOK

GODFATHER
OF
SHRI MAHILA GRIHA UDYOG LIJJAT PAPAD

**PUNYASHLOK
CHHAGANBAPA**

Author
RAMNARAYAN NAGARDAS PATHAK
Rendered into English
By
Prof. V. T. YARDI

Published By
SHRI MAHILA GRIHA UDYOG LIJJAT PAPAD
Shankarbari Lane,
Jagannath Shankarsheth Road,
Bombay-400 002.

All Rights are reserved by the Publisher

First Edition-2000 Copies

Published in January, 1980

Price Rs. 3/-

PRINTERS :

Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad

Printing Division

5, 6, 9, Diwali Darshan,

M. G. Road, Borivli (East),

Bombay - 400 066.

Phone : 66 34 57

PUBLISHER :

Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad

Shankarbari Lane,

Jagannath Shankarsheth Road,

Bombay - 400 002

❀ सुमुख भवन वेद वेदाङ्ग पुस्तकालय ❀

वेद रत्नगुप्ती ।

आगत क्रमांक.....

17062183

दिनांक.....

Many divine qualities emerge in man when the Great Lord Krishna bestows His highest blessings upon him. The life of the Late Revered Chhaganbapa was a living illustration of simplicity, self-control, large heartedness and love. It was because of the presence of these divine qualities in his life that one is inspired to bow down to him.

— REVERED DONGRE MAHARAJ

Who showed us the right path.....



The Godfather of the Institution

SHRI CHHAGANLAL KARAMSHI PAREKH

Born : 27th June, 1894) (Departed : 14th Dec., 1968

PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

The full name of the Godfather of our institution — fondly known as Chhaganbapa — was Shri Chhaganlal Karamshi Parekh. He kindly consented, in response to our humble request, to be the Godfather of our institution — “Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad” which came into existence, on an experimental basis, in the year 1959. Till the end of his life he continued to provide his invaluable help and guidance to this institution.

We decided to bring out this small biography of his with a view to perpetuate the sacred memory of this great man who reared and nurtured our institution with love and care. We, therefore, requested Shri Ramnarayan N. Pathak, the popular writer from Gujarat and author of the monumental book “Sadhucharit Chhaganbapa”, to undertake this project. He readily accepted our request. Shri Pathak had great regard for Late Revered Chhaganbapa. He has written this biography of Bapa with feelings of deep love and respect. We hope that this book would prove to be a source of inspiration to the vast number of people associated with our Institution and also to the future generation.

We are deeply grateful to all those who extended their co-operation in bringing out this useful book. May the holy blessings of the late revered Chhaganbapa be showered on all of us.

P R E F A C E

It was Shri Dhebarbhai, who had once said that "Just as the Charkha was given to the nation by the 'Father of the Nation', Lijjat Papad was Chhaganbapa's contribution to the nation." This institution has performed the basic national reconstruction work by providing thousands of women with honourable means of livelihood in various home industries. It has explained the importance of self-development efforts to millions of Indians. The activities of "Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad", are no longer confined to Bombay, Maharashtra or Gujarat, but have spread out like the branches of a Banian tree beyond the frontiers of India. Late Chhaganbapa, who had sown the seed of this great Banian tree was a benevolent person. He fostered the institution with the love of a grandfather. The public welfare accomplished by Shri Chhaganbapa through this institution can only be compared to that of the sage Bhagiratha who brought the river Ganges down from the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas. The women earning through this institution are not only benefited economically but are also able to spread the message of self-respect and self-reliance in their family. This institution has thus become instrumental in bringing peace, happiness and prosperity to many families.

It was Shri P. D. Dattani who first conceived the idea of publishing a short life story of Chhaganbapa as Bapa was the first source of inspiration in the founding of this institution. Such a book describing significant events in the life of Bapa and holding a mirror to the philosophy of his life, would be the best commemoration of his services. This book would provide inspiration to all those who are associated with the multifarious activities of the institution. The book would also acquaint the future generations with the Divine life of a great soul. I appreciated the suggestion of Shri P. D. Dattani and readily accepted the task.

I had occasion to visit Bombay in November 1976, for some personal work. During my stay in Bombay I had the good fortune to visit Bandra Centre of 'Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad'. I was accompanied by Smt. Hiraben Betai, wife of late Shri Hemraj Betai. Smt. Betai had played a glorious role as one of the generals in the Indian National Army of Netaji Subhashchandra Bose. I was deeply impressed by the activities of the institution as I was taken around various sections by the staff of the institution.

Nearly 350 women were present at the centre. It was 5.30 A.M. They had all come there in spite of the chilly weather of the winter. Flour and spices were being weighed in one room. Each item was being carefully entered in

the register. A lady cashier was making payments. There was a fairly long queue of women outside the counter. Each woman was receiving payment after due calculations. All the activities were going on smoothly according to a schedule and there was no confusion anywhere.

After having surveyed all the activities of the Centre we all sat down in a meeting. We were introduced to one another. We were happy when we came to know the background of the life of the women who work in the institution and learned how they helped one another for their own advancement. I recalled an instance of how a woman had lived a life of dignity and supported herself against adverse circumstances by preparing and selling papads. I related the story to the gathering. "Many years ago when I was writing the biography of Bapuji, I happened to meet Raliatben, Bapuji's elder sister. I found her rolling papads. Her daughter, a widow, was also rolling papads with her. I was quite surprised. With some hesitation I asked her: 'Why are you making so many papads?' She explained, 'you see! Brother is not doing legal practice these days and I don't like to live on charity. So my daughter and I make papad everyday. We get 12 annas everyday within which we manage the household'." Raliatben related this with great pride, and I could see a radiant glow of the spirit of self-reliance reflecting in her eyes.

According to the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, village industries occupy an important position in the task of national reconstruction. He started several village industries on an experimental basis at Maganwadi in Wardha. He created, through these experiments, a favourable atmosphere for the growth of village industries all over India. "Bapuji gave Charkha to the nation, and Chhaganbapa gave Papad", how meaningful and apt were these words of Shri Dhebarbhai! Chhaganbapa was a man of great foresight. To him the future prosperity of India lay in developing village industries. Bapu used to say in those days "India was once a land of gold. It was a land of plenty. No other country in the world was so richly endowed with natural resources as we were. Besides, we have a large population — crores of living machines in human shape, nowhere else to be found except in China. That is the reason why, despite my old age, I have made up my mind to leave no stone unturned to instill new life into our small industries which are on the verge of extinction. I am convinced that it is only through such efforts that this nation can be transformed into a land of gold which it once was."

Gandhiji started the experiment of village upliftment at Maganwadi with the enthusiasm of an young man. Once Mahadevbhai, who had gone out for some work outside the village, saw on

his return a strange spectacle. The sixty-four year old Mahatma Gandhi was himself grinding corn on the grinding stone and Kasturba who was of about the same age, was helping him with the enthusiasm and energy which is rare even among the young.

Mahatma Gandhi began to relate, with his childlike enthusiasm and innocence, the story of his experiment. "Listen Mahadev", said he "The taste of rice ground on this stone is really unique. I tried turning round that oil crushing wheel myself. I found it very light." Mahadev-bhai looked on, surprised and dumbfounded.

Why must Bapu have tried such experiments at an advanced age of 64? The reason is that he firmly believed that it is only through persistent endeavour and self-reliance that one can build India into a great nation. Any work will indeed be monumental if it results in the benefit of lakhs of people for years to come. Cottage and household industry has, therefore, an important role to play in the all round progress of the nation.

It was Swami Vivekananda who had said that character, purity and righteous conduct are the true basis of judging not only the individual but also that of the society. Swamiji often referred to a significant line from the teachings of lord Buddha: "Man's life must be for the good of maximum number of people and for the happiness of maximum number of people". These in fact

have become the guiding principle of the Ramakrishna Mission. We see the overwhelming influence of these words in the life of the late Chhaganbapa. His life is, indeed exemplary for the future generations.

In the post-independent India happiness of the people has not increased in proportion to the increase in material means of happiness. The advance of science and technology has resulted in a tremendous increase in human desires and aspirations. There is mad rush also to fulfil every one of these desires that arises in the human mind. However, hardly few people realise that the peace of mind cannot be attained through the pursuit of material pleasures. Selfishness can never lead to real happiness. On the contrary, it breeds envy, hatred, enmity and strife. The real happiness of an individual lies in the happiness of all. Genuine security in life comes from love, magnanimity tolerance and faith in God.

Here a humble effort is made through this book to present the life story and principles of a great soul who worshipped god and rendered unstinted service to the people. We earnestly hope and pray that this book shall prove to be source of inspiration to the readers.

— Ramnarayan N. Pathak

CORRIGENDUM: On page no. 30, second line please read—dissociate—after slowly.

INDEX

1	Godfather of the Institution	1
2	Childhood and Education	5
3	Honesty : A Key to Success	8
4	Ideal Family Life	13
5	Chhaganbapa : A Beneficent Mediator	16
6	Preparation for the Retirement	20
7	Balance-Sheet : of Life and Firm Resolution	23
8	Social Work in Calcutta	29
9	Geneva Convention	34
10	The Moment of Joy and Fulfilment	38
11	At the Feet of Thakkarbappa	42
12	Kashthamaun Vrata	47
13	In the Mountainous Land of the North India	51
14	Flood Relief Work in Assam	64
15	Gujarat Bhavan of Haridwar	73
16	Lohana Conference, Bombay	79
17	Serious Illness	83
18	Kutch Earthquake Relief Work	88
19	Fifteen years of Public Service in Kutch	96
20	Guidance to the 'Lijjat' Institution	111
21	Farewell	122
22	The Goal & some Principles of Bapa's Life	132
	Appendices	139

CHAPTER — I

GODFATHER OF THE INSTITUTION

The man behind the establishment of Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad Institution was Late Shri Chhaganbapa. He was a deeply religious man with fine knowledge of the human nature. He was a man of sharp intelligence, exceptional efficiency and pragmatism. He realised that God is omnipresent in every form of life and that the service of mankind is the service of God. He sought divine revelation through the service of mankind and through Karmayoga as laid down in the Bhagwatgeeta.

Shri Chhaganbapa was instrumental in the establishment of several institutions. He nurtured them and ensured that they remained active. These institutions were varied such as schools, colleges, hostels, temples, dharmshalas, hospitals, industrial homes, etc. These institutions could be described as Chhaganbapa's loving gifts to the Nation. Several other institutions in India which though not started by Chhaganbapa, derived inspiration, encouragement and guidance from him. The imprint of Chhaganbapa's ideas and thoughts can clearly be seen to be radiating in the functioning of Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad Institution from its

inception. The account of how Chhaganbapa became Godfather of the institution, is indeed very interesting.

Shri Chhaganbapa was born in the Lohana community. It is an enterprising and skilful business community spread all over India. The community is divided and sub-divided into various sub-castes. For many years efforts were made to uplift and integrate these sub-castes through some constructive work. Finally, in the year 1952 a conference of the entire Lohana community was organised from 26th to 28th December in Bombay. Chhaganbapa accepted the responsibility of this conference in response to the requests of the various leaders of the community.

In connection with the work of this conference Chhaganbapa came to Bombay on October 1, 1952. In the initial stages none was enthusiastic about the conference. But the moment Chhaganbapa took the initiative, life and vigour became visible into the work of the conference. Many active men and women came and joined Chhaganbapa. Generally, such conferences do not achieve anything beyond organising speeches and discussions and passing resolutions. However, Chhaganbapa gave a new direction to this conference. He successfully instilled a sense of coherency and unity in everybody and inspired them to take up several projects of constructive acti-

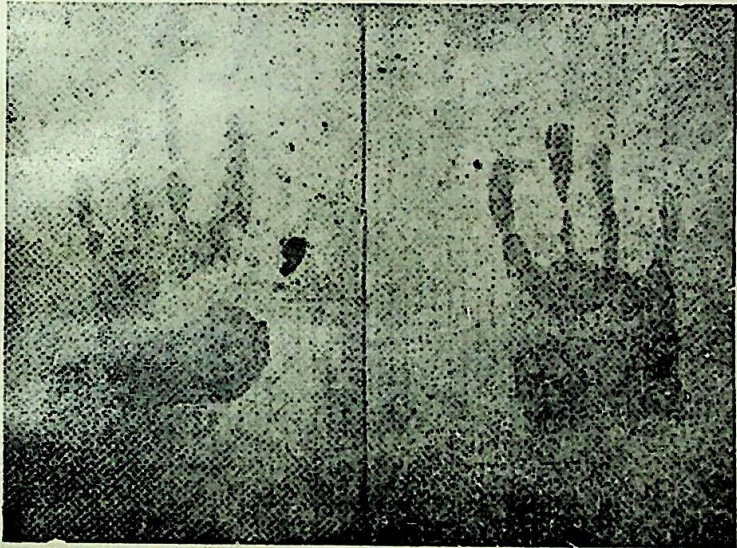
vities. Several projects sprang up as a result of this conference.

In connection with the work of the conference, Shri P. D. Dattani and other tenants of the LOHANA NIWAS (where Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad institution later started) came in close contact with Chhaganbapa. Chhaganbapa had deeply impressed the volunteers of the conference, with his piety, selflessness, matchless efficiency and foresight. The residents of 'Lohana Niwas' had been for a long time toying with the idea of doing some constructive work. But they were not clear as to what kind of work could be taken up and as to how it could be done. Chhaganbapa gave them clear direction and guidance. Accordingly, on 15th March, 1959, on the terrace of Lohana Niwas, Smt. Jaswantiben Jamnadas Popat, Smt. Parvatiben Ramdas Thobhani, Smt. Ujamben Mathuradas Lakhani, Smt. Navalben Narandas Kundliya and three other women established and started 'Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad'.

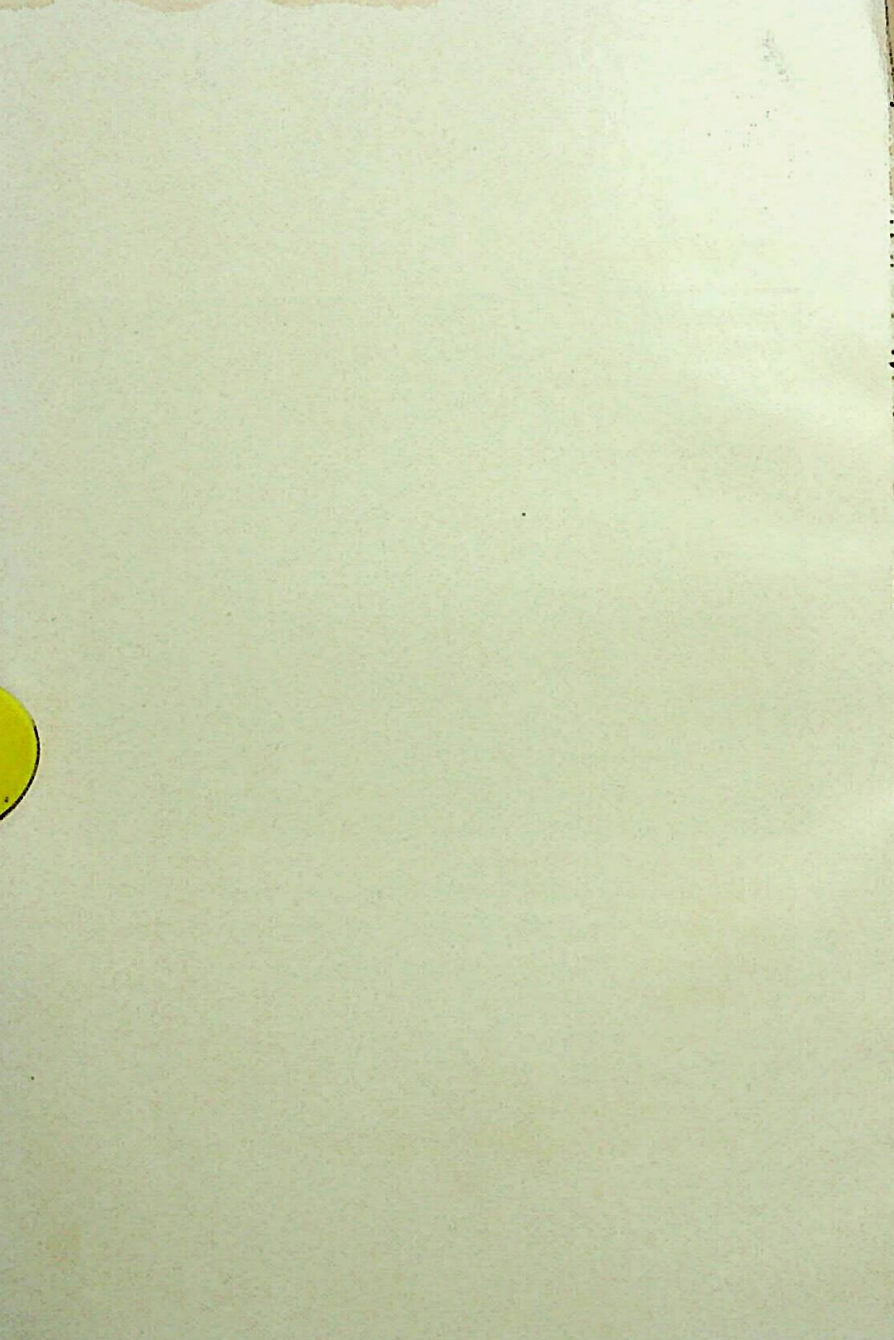
The motive of the organisation was to promote the welfare of all. Therefore, it was decided that the membership of the organisation should be thrown open to all regardless of caste, community, region and religion. The organisation had to face many difficulties in the initial period. Chhaganbapa was then in Bombay for sometime. Sisters had confidence that they would be able to overcome all the difficulties if Chha-

ganbapa blessed their activity. Therefore, within 15-20 days of the establishment of the institution, Chhaganbapa was invited to see its working. The women organisers had planned to make Chhaganbapa the Godfather of the organisation and they requested Bapa to put his 'Kum Kum' foot prints at the entrance of the organisation, Chhaganbapa was embarrassed. Sisters insisted, but Bapa did not want himself to be portrayed as a living 'saint'. Ultimately, one of the sisters suggested a way out. It was suggested that Bapa should put his 'Kum Kum' palm print on a plain paper and give it as a souvenir to the sisters. All the people liked the idea. They persuaded Bapa and at last he agreed to become the 'Godfather' of the organisation due to his deep affection for the daughters and sisters of the institution.

This is how Chhaganbapa became the Godfather of Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad. His whole life is worth studying and worth emulating.



On his first visit to the institution Shri Chhaganbapa gave Palmprints (of Kumkum) of his both hands as a token of his blessing to the sisters.



CHAPTER — II

CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION

The ancestors of Chhaganbapa must have been jewellers. This explains the surname 'Parekh'. They hailed from Gondal town in Saurashtra region of Gujarat State. Their descendants used to be foodgrains merchants. Chhaganbapa's father, Karamshi Parekh, and uncle, Jethabhair left Gondal for good and settled in Rajkot. They handled the foodgrain department of the Rajkot state for sometime. They were extremely honest in their business. They would go to Khandwa, Agra and as far as to the Punjab for the purchase of foodgrains. Although the Parekh family was not particularly wealthy, they were remarkably hospitable. Jamnaba, the mother of Chhaganbapa was by nature deeply religious and generous. Chhaganbapa was born on 27th June, 1894, to such a pious family. Chhaganbapa was spiritually oriented right from the childhood. He would frequently visit the temple of 'Nakalganji Mahadeo' which was near their house, and would sit there singing devotional songs.

While in school, child Chhagan was known as one of the brilliant pupils. In the High School, he became popular among relatives, friends and even used to be ranked among the first three or four.

Very few studied English in those days. Karamshibapa used to be very happy whenever his son read lessons from English books or recited English poems. He often said, "I shall make my Chhagan a barrister". But Jamnaba, religious and devout that she was, would say, "Children forget their religion and get converted when they go to England. It does not matter if we have to eat half CHAPATI rather than a full one, but I would rather have my son by my side, where I can look after him". In those days going out of Saurashtra or Gujarat was almost like going abroad. One Shri Kunwarji Trivedi, a friend of Karamshibapa, was a regular visitor to their home. Once, in the course of a conversation, Kunwarjibhai said, "My two sons are making good money in Jharia (Bihar). Why don't you send Chhagan to Jharia? He knows English and, therefore, would be able to deal with the Railway officials and White Sahibs and would be able to procure some railway wagons. He could also be in the good books of the mine-owners and would be able to earn a good salary."

Karamshibapa was convinced and after some days, when Kunwarji's son returned home, it was decided that Chhagan should be sent to Jharia. Purshottambhai, the son of a mine-owner of Jharia named Gangji Dosa, had come to Rajkot around this time. Chhagan's parents decided to send Chhagan to Jharia along with Purushottam. Thus, at the age of 19 Chhaganbhai started off

towards the distant east from the western regions of India. He was going to try his fortune in the land of 'Black Diamonds'. The journey was comfortable and interesting as he was accompanied by his friends. When the train halted at junctions, Chhagan would get off from the train, stroll about on the platform, talk to the people and the shop-keepers. He never once worried about missing the train or about being left behind and stranded on the platform.

Chhagan had once visited Bombay to see a ship. He spoke to the British Officer on duty in English. The officer was quite impressed and showed him around the ship on his own.

Chhaganbhai reached Jharia, and soon became popular among relatives, friends and even among strangers. It was in the year 1912.

CHAPTER — III

HONESTY : A KEY TO SUCCESS

In all spheres of life, honesty and honesty alone, is the key to success. Honesty is of fundamental importance, particularly in business. Jharia, Dhanbad and Raniganj are the regions known for "Black Diamonds". Since not many people knew English in those days Chhaganbhai Parekh, who was a Matriculate, became quite useful and popular due to his knowledge of English.

The clerk who looked after the affairs of mines was known as 'Master'. The loading of goods and the requisition of railway wagons used to be considered a difficult job in those days. One had to get in contact with the British officials to get the permission and it was granted only after a certain degree of persuasion. Chhaganbhai was entrusted with this job because of his proficiency in English and the confidence with which he conversed with the British officials. Chhaganbhai soon won the confidence of British officials. He was able to procure as many wagons as he needed while others managed only one or two with great difficulty. Chhaganbhai made it a practice to rise very early in the morning and would not go to bed until late in the night. He did his work

with honesty and with a great sense of involvement, as if he was doing his own business. Naturally, the owner of the mines, Rustomji Ardesar Mukadam was highly pleased with Chhaganbhai. Chhaganbhai worked with him for a year and a half. Rustomji and his wife Shirinben were, therefore, aggrieved when they learnt that Chhaganbhai had decided to leave. They tried their best to persuade him against his decision, but seeing that Chhaganbhai was firm in his decision, they gave him a warm send-off.

After starting his independent business this young man, in his early twenties, quickly earned wide popularity and respect due to his clean conduct. He proved by his own life that success in business does not depend merely on skill, but on honesty. In every sphere of life truth and honesty are necessary but it is so especially in business. Unfortunately, a wrong notion has developed that one can do anything in business. Obviously this notion is mischievous and misleading. In the world of business, transactions take place on the basis of mutual agreements, bills of exchange and cheques. Such transactions are based on mutual trust, quite often on merely oral promises. Prestige and goodwill are more important than money in business and only truth and honesty can provide such prestige and goodwill.

Chhaganbhai Parekh acquired an image of one known for his zeal for truth and honesty, not only in Jharia and Dhanbad but in the whole of the mining region in Bihar. In those days coal was mainly used by the railways and the coal business was highly competitive.

Even the wealthy Indian businessmen were usually looked down upon by the railway officials because many of them were selfish, dishonest and unscrupulous. Young Chhaganbhai, however, made a distinct impression on the British officials. The British officials who understood the importance of trustworthiness, found Chhaganbhai to be a very different person from the rest of the lot. Whenever any complaints were made against Chhaganbhai or against his goods by envious competitors, the British officials would cut them short with a remark "I know Mr. Parekh better than you do".

Chhaganbhai developed cordial relations with Mr. Burklow, the then Chief Inspector of Mines, Mr. Whiteworth, the then Chief Mining Engineer and Mr. Simpson, a Mining Inspector. Chhaganbhai had made a deep study of all the aspects of mining. He maintained latest figures in respect of not only his mines but about the entire mining belt. He was quite often consulted by these officials about the identity of the type of coal and its purchases. Once negotiations were in progress for a large scale purchase of coal.

If the deal were to take place Chhaganbhai would have benefited but would have meant a loss to the department (Railway). So Chhaganbhai known for his honesty and trustworthiness pointed out it to the chief, Mr. Whiteworth. Mr. Whiteworth realised that he was wrong and said to Chhaganbhai "Mr. Parekh, I have never come across a noble person like you".

This incident reminds one of a similar incident in the life of Mahatma Gandhi during his "Satyagraha" movements in South Africa. In the course of his negotiations about finalising the conditions of settlements with the Prime Minister, Gen. Smuts, Gandhiji pointed out: "This condition is not advantageous to you and I want to draw your attention to this fact. However, if you are aware of all the implications of this condition, I have nothing to say about it". Gen. Smuts was taken aback. He pondered over the condition again and he realised that he had not taken into account the point to which Gandhiji had drawn his attention. He immediately thanked Gandhiji and said that he had yet to see another person like Gandhiji.

Gold has to go through fire before it can be pure or it has to be rubbed against the black testing stone. Honest men are exposed to all kinds of dangers. Chhaganbapa in his life went through many such experiences, but he was not perturbed by them. Once Mr. Simpson said to

him. "When you have such capabilities why don't you appear at the examinations for the selection of second class manager? I shall recommend your case". Chhaganbhai replied. "I do not want to become an employee, I want to become a mine owner."

CHAPTER — IV

IDEAL FAMILY LIFE

Nowadays young men who are settled abroad come to India to get married and take their wives along with them. Such young men do not enjoy the fruits of joint family system. In olden times marriages used to be settled by elderly people in the family and young married couples lived in the joint family.

In the year 1914 Chhaganbhai left Jharia for Saurashtra to get married. He was seen off by a number of his friends. When the train left the station, the whole compartment was filled with garlands. It was rare to come across a young person who was able to earn so much love and affection in so little a time. When Chhaganbhai came back to Jharia after marriage he started his married life in a small and simple house. Since then for several years this small single storied house became a sanctuary of his family life. Chhaganbapa always got up very early in the morning and left for work. He returned only late in the night.

But in spite of such difficulties he taught his wife to read and write. In those days women of the joint families were not supposed to converse freely with their husbands in the presence of

the elderly members of the family. Mother-in-law and the sisters-in-law maintained a constant vigil to ensure that this custom was properly abided by. It was very common for the men to treat women as mere means of their pleasure. In such times it was rare to come across a husband interested in the education of his wife. Among such rare men were Justice Ranade, Mahatma Gandhi and 'Darji' Motilal of Vadhwani. Chhaganbapa found time to teach Maniben and read Ramayana for the benefit of the neighbouring women. Inspired by Chhaganbapa's example many young men of Jharia began to educate their wives. Chhaganbapa received complete co-operation from Maniben. Their relationship with each other was based on mutual love and respect. The family life of Chhaganbapa was exemplary. Chhaganbapa was very particular about proper upbringing of children, education, household management, cleanliness and punctuality. These qualities of his helped the neighbouring families to learn many things from him. Maniben was not a mere 'shadow' of Chhaganbapa. She brightened the household by virtue of her independent personality. This was what made the couple distinctively remarkable. If Chhaganbapa's generosity was no less than that of a king Maniben was indeed the queen of the house. The selfless and service-oriented life of Chhaganbapa was greatly enriched by his pious and devout better half Maniben.

Chhaganbapa was known for his hospitality. His house was always full of guests. Maniben looked after the guests with great care and love and provided a shelter to Chhaganbapa's wide friend circle.

One can see this ideal family life of Chhaganbapa clearly reflected in the family lives of his sons Shri Ratilalbhai and Shri Mulchandbhai. They and their other family members have with them the rich heritage of their noble parents. The influence of Chhaganbapa was not confined to his own family, it benefited immensely even the family lives of his relatives, friends and associates also.

CHAPTER — V

CHHAGANBAPA : A BENEFICENT MEDIATOR

There are certain vicious factors which contaminate the purity of real life. One of the most important of such factors, which poisons the sweet relationship between nations, parties, and friends is selfishness. This poison of selfishness has continued to disrupt peace and happiness of several dear and near ones. In the olden days it was the Mahajan (Eldermen) of the community who often played an important role in preventing this poison from destroying the peace and stability of normal relationships. These Mahajans or the community leaders were the custodians of Indian rural culture and traditions and were known for their fairness and impartiality. Chhaganbapa was one such selfless person in Mahajan tradition.

As I write about the events from the life of late Shri Chhaganbapa, I am reminded of a similar event from the life of Mahatmaji. Mahatmaji like Chhaganbapa, grew up in the tradition of Mahajans who maintained the stability of society. While in South Africa, he was working as a lawyer at the office of a prominent merchant. At that time in Ranavav village near the city of Porbandar there were two merchants.



Better half of Shri Chhaganbapa, late Smt. Manibahen Chhaganlal Parekh, who always stood by him firmly in all his benevolent work.



Both were settled in South Africa and were great friends. Once there arose a dispute between the two regarding some financial transactions. Finally, the dispute had to be taken to the court. Both the parties were uncompromising. Both were millionaires and also older in age than Gandhiji. The case came to Gandhiji. Gandhiji convinced both the parties about the futility of court-fight so effectively that the dispute was promptly settled amicably. Such petty disputes are quite common in every household even at present. But Mahajans who once resolved these disputes impartially, are no more to be seen. The welfare of the society depends upon the peaceful settlement of all the disputes. Chhaganbapa promoted peace and happiness through peaceful settlement of all types of social conflicts.

Chhaganbapa was negotiating a deal on behalf of M/s. K. Worah & Company, with a mine owner, the Raja of Panchkot, for the purchase of coal mines in Chirkunda in the district of Manbhum in Bihar. At the end of the talks there was an agreement. In the meanwhile, Shri Khataubhai Shethia a big industrialist and a mine owner from Dhanbad directly approached the Raja of Panchkot and initiated the negotiations with him. He made a more attractive offer to the Raja. The latter entered into an agreement with both the parties. Things suddenly took a turn for the worst and a dispute ensued. Both the parties sought legal advice and were about to move the court.

Seth Shri Harishankarbhai of the K. Worah & Co. and Seth Shri Khataubhai Shethia had been very close friends. Now it seemed as if their long friendship was on the verge of a break-up. This was indeed a very serious situation and Chhaganbapa decided to intervene in the matter.

Late Kankuben, the wife of Shri Khataubhai Sethia used to consider Chhaganbapa as her brother. She was unhappy about the quarrel between the two friends. Therefore, she requested Chhaganbapa to intervene, which he did with supreme confidence. He used all his skills to convince both of them of the futility of fighting. Ultimately, both the parties agreed to appoint Chhaganbapa as the arbitrator and to accept his verdict as final and binding. Chhaganbapa's verdict was as follows:—

“Neither of the two parties should be the owner of the mine. It should be converted into an independent Trust with the management being handled by M/s. K. Worah & Co. and its entire income should be spent for Charitable purposes.”

The Trust was formed and was named as “Shri Laxmi Narain Trust”. There were six trustees and Chhaganbapa was one of them. Later, charity worth lakhs of rupees was done through this Trust. Several institutions of public welfare were established.

Chhaganbapa, through his persuasive ability, was able to resolve the conflict between two powerful businessmen whose intelligence, wealth and prestige had made them stubborn and uncompromising. The secret of Chhaganbapa's success was in his impartiality, honesty and righteousness, and resultant personal integrity and high moral character.

CHAPTER — VI

PREPARATION FOR THE RETIREMENT

From times immemorial in our great Bharat, there is a certain accepted system of organising one's life. According to that system human life is divided into four parts. The average span of life is taken as of hundred years. The first 25 years are the years of Brāhmnachrya-shram, a phase of celibacy and learning. The second 25 years are the years of Grihasthashrama, a phase of family life and conjugal happiness. The third 25 years are the years of Vanaprasthashrama, years of old age and retirement and the last 25 years are the years of Sanyasashrama, a phase of renunciation and austerity.

Ancient Indian culture was predominantly rural-based. After the age of fifty a person entrusted the responsibilities of the family to his son and devoted himself to social work. This was beneficial not only to the person concerned, but also to the village and the country as a whole as the surplus energy with which man is endowed with by nature was used for the welfare work of the society and other thought did not boggle his mind. Gandhiji's principle of trusteeship has the same objective.

It is through moderation and self-control that one can live a healthy and long life of hundred years. As poet-king Bhartruhari says "Man cannot enjoy the pleasures of the senses for ever. At a certain point they leave him. Why then does he not renounce such pleasures on his own? What is the difference?" The poet says that there is a world of difference. If one desires to hear but the hearing power is vanishing; if one desires to see but the vision is weakening, if one desires to speak but the tongue is not lashing; if one wishes to walk but the legs move no more, then in such a situation there would be no limit to one's unhappiness. Therefore, the key to peace, contentment and supreme happiness lies in controlling the powers of senses while they are alive and strong and in diverting them from the path of personal pleasure to become the source of social happiness.

This is the true way to happiness shown in our ancient culture. Chhaganbapa accepted this way with great ease. Even before he reached the age of vanaprastha, he had firmly made up his mind to renounce the worldly life.

In 1912 Chhaganbapa went to Jharia. He devoted himself to business and to activities of public welfare for the next 27 years. In the year 1939 he decided to dedicate his whole life to the noble cause of social work. He prepared a declaration in which he wrote a candid report of his 27 years of life in Jharia. This report is indeed

a testimony of the honesty and integrity of this great man. One who reads it cannot help being moved and inspired by it. It has a power to lead many a wayward soul to the right path. This inspiring declaration of Chhaganbapa is given in his own words in the next chapter.

CHAPTER — VII

Balance-sheet: Of Life and Firm Resolution

"I have written this declaration being fully aware of the euphemeral nature of human life and it is in this context I have fixed my main goal of life. The declaration is written with a view to act upon it and with a solemn oath of integrity. I pray to God that He may help me in carrying out, the responsibilities implied in the declaration and invoke His blessing to make my family members responsive towards my resolve.

I write this brief report of my life, so that my family and friends may know how I began life and what transformations it had to undergo. I shall deliberate on the main objectiveis of my life at a later stage.

I came to Jharia in 1912 with the help of Shri Damodar Kunwaraji Trivedi. I started as a Chief clerk on a salary Rs. 25/- per month, at the Chanda Mines of Sheth Rustomji Ardeskar Mukadam. After six months I switched over to the khas kusunda mine of Pancha Devji Mistri, where my salary was fixed at Rs. 30/- per month. The management of this mine was in the hands of Kanji Khengar. Here my salary rose to Rs. 40/-

per month in two years. In 1914 I was appointed in the 'Tisra' Mine. The management of this mine was with G. K. Dossa and Sons. Sheth Gangji Dosa, Shri Khimji Dosa and their manager Bhanji Natha were so happy with the work that they gave me a bonus of Rs. 1,000/- to Rs. 1,500/-, in addition to my salary. They all had immense love and complete trust in me. Bhanji Natha the General Manager, was particularly pleased with my work. He permitted me to do independent business of my own. Thus, I was able to take a contract to supply coal to Rajkot Ginning Factory. In the course of the next two years of my job I came in close contact with Bhai Gopaldas Premji. He was pleased with my work and made me a partner in his Company. His brother Jeevraj Premji was also then in Jharia. I gave up the partnership in just 20 days because I had differences with Shri Jeevraj Premji. It was then that I started my own firm M/s. Chhaganlal K. Parekh & Co.

"By the grace of God I was successful in business, as the returns were good and I began to send money to my father. My father was then indebted to Shri Balwantraai Maganlal Nagar. I was able to repay the entire debt. Moreover, I felt happy by freeing my uncle Shri Jetha Kalidas from the burden of his debt also. Our house was then hypothecated and my parents were living in a rented house. I purchased a new house for them. I had to spend Rs. 17 to 18

CHAPTER — VIII

SOCIAL WORK IN CALCUTTA

Chhaganbapa's association with the city of Calcutta was fairly long. He lived in a rented house in the Bhavanipur area of Calcutta. Members of his family live in the same house even to-day. Chhaganbapa's sitting room in this house was a small room by the side of the street. In a small glass cabinet in that room one can still find the images of 'Shree Ram' and 'Shree Krishna' whom he worshipped everyday. This small room in Bapa's house had become a birth place of many public institutions of Calcutta. Chhaganbapa was connected, directly or indirectly, with most of the institutions of the Gujarati Community in Calcutta. He was either a member, director or trustee of several institutions like Nursery, Primary and Secondary Schools, College, Hospital, Temple and Mahajan Wadi etc.

As one closely connected with such organisations, Chhaganbapa was constantly engaged in all kinds of work like, acquiring land for these organisations, constructing buildings for them, organising managing committees or boards of trustees and giving guidance for the organisers and activists. As soon as an organisation became

"well-established" and self-sustained, he would slowly himself with it. It is relatively easier to start an organisation but to run it efficiently and to make it self-supporting is indeed very difficult. But the most difficult thing is to dissociate oneself from an 'established' organisation. But for Chhaganbapa it was a matter of great happiness. For him it was like birds feeling happy when they see their little ones fly on their own for the first time!

Bapa was instrumental in starting many institutions like Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad, but he did not tie down himself to any institution and always kept aloof from them. He was a true judge of man in the field of social service. Quickly recognising the qualities of man coming into his contact, he used to encourage and promote right type of man for right type of work.

Chhaganbapa especially encouraged women to enlarge their field of activity beyond mere household chores, and to take interest in social work. Chhaganbapa continued the tradition of Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Mahatma Gandhi who did much for the upliftment of women.

Shree Laxminarain Trust Maternity Home and Hospital run by 'Bhavanipur Gujarati Stri Mandal' is one of the most significant among the various institutions in Calcutta promoted by Chhaganbapa. Chhaganbapa spared no hardships for

the establishment of these institutions. He insisted that these institutions should be managed by women. He had his own ways of training women in the field of social work. A concrete example of this is the chief organisor of the hospital, Smt. Urvashiben Dhupeliā. It would be interesting to know how Chhaganbapa used to prepare women for social work. The paragraphs given below recount the experiences of Smt. Dhupeliā in her own words :

“I have been associated with Bapa since the year 1940. I could as well be considered as his daughter except that I was not born in his house. He gave me suggestions, advice and guidance in my work in the hospital, from time to time. Even in my family life also I could learn many things from Bapa. Being the eldest in the family, the entire responsibility of the family was on my shoulders. Bapa gave me the strength of mind to fulfil that responsibility. Bapa would make several suggestions about the minutest details of family life such as the upbringing of children, relations with the other members of the family, management of the household etc. He would explain to us the nature of work of the women's committees. I was rather a quiet type of woman. When I refused to become the secretary, he persuaded me with these words: “It is through acceptance of responsibility that work is accomplished and one acquires moral strength.” If Bapa had not given his valuable advice to me then, I would

not have been able to manage the household and the hospital today."

"Bapa encouraged us to collect funds. We have collected funds by organising dramas and Garba dance programmes. It was Bapa who taught us how to maintain accounts. Bapa would explain to us how to work economically and to behave properly with the patients. All the trustees of this institution are women. There is not a single institution like this in the whole of Calcutta. Due to proper maintenance of accounts and economical management we were never short of funds."

"There is a similar institution in Bombay (Lijjat Papad) where all work is done by women. Bapa would give the example of that institution to encourage us. Whenever Bapa came to meet us, he inquired about the health of patients. He would ask whether the doctors and nurses paid proper attention to the patients. "Even if they pay less attention you should continue to serve the poor and sick" — he always used to say.

"We would often have meetings with Bapa, and if at such meetings problems pertaining to the hospital were discussed, Bapa would never allow to interrupt the meeting to entertain a visitor, however important a person he might be. Our faith in religion increased due to Bapa's pious presence. In the month of 'Shravana' Bapa would

observe fast, recite passages from Ramayana to us, take us to the temple and make us chant the devotional songs. In those days I was not accustomed to getting up early in the morning. Once I thought to myself if Bapa can get up so early in the morning why can't I? Soon we all got used to getting up early in the morning. Bapa's diet consisted of just fruits and vegetables, so we also learnt to live on simple diet."

In Bombay, Bapa would stay with Shri Hemrajbhai Betai, a general of the Indian National Army of Netaji Subhashchandra Bose, and his wife, Smt. Hiraben Betai. Smt. Hiraben would treat Bapa as her father. Bapa did not have any daughter, he had two sons. Smt. Hiraben once narrated the memories of Bapa to the writer of this book in following words :

"Bapa taught me Hindi. He would bring books for me. He would see to it that I did a few hours of reading everyday. Whenever he was out of town he would write to me to enquire about my progress in the study of Hindi. It was only through his encouragement that I could get my 'Kovid' Examination certificate in Hindi. Bapa encouraged women to come out of the four walls of the domestic life. He founded 'Balikagriha' and looked after the girls there with paternal love and care."

CHAPTER — IX

GENEVA CONVENTION

International Labour Convention was held in Geneva in 1947. It was proposed from various quarters that Shri Chhaganbapa should participate in this Convention as a representative of 'The Indian Mining Federation' and 'The Indian Colliery Owners Association'. The Government of India gave its approval to this proposal. Mr. Datson was chosen to represent the Indian Mining Federation. This was a good opportunity for Bapa to utilise his capabilities in the service of coal industry. Although he went to the Convention as a representative of the mine owners, he advocated the cause of labourers and tried to project their interest.

Representatives from various nations had come to Geneva to participate in the Convention: Mr. Datson was with Bapa. In the course of the Convention Bapa came in contact with several people. Due to his pleasing personality he earned their respect. Bapa's speech in the open session deeply impressed everyone, and Bapa was elected as the Vice-President of the Steering Committee. This proved that Bapa's selection as a representative to this convention was very appropriate.

Bapa in his speech, expressed his views on the development of coal-mining industry, not only of India but of the whole world, and on the improvement of the lives of thousands of mine-workers. He supported his views with statistical data. When he concluded his speech, thousands of people who were present at the convention responded with thunderous applause. He, in his speech, submitted a scheme about labour-management relations. The scheme was fully of pragmatism and impartiality. After the speech several people came to see him. Among them were not only the delegates of the Convention but also the leaders of workers' organisations and of the organisations of management. This was a great achievement in the life of Chhaganbapa.

In spite of the fact that Bapa was only a matriculate he had acquired considerable proficiency in English through experience. He had extensive statistical data about the coal-mining industry in India and the world-over. Sometimes the statistical data which was not available at the industry department of the government of India, could be found at Chhaganbapa's office. Chhaganbapa's notes and records were generally accepted as standard and studied in the coal-mining industry.

Chhaganbapa visited Paris and London on his way back to India after the convention was over. He went and saw the mining region of New

Castle near London. He was with Mr. Datson. The living conditions of the mine-workers, their decent houses and high standard of living appealed to him. He saw that the children of mine-workers and of mine-owners went to the same schools. Bapa was very happy to see these things. He resolved to himself that similar conditions of work and life must be created in India also.

From London he went to Holland. There he saw the Harline coalfields which are only seven miles away from Amsterdam. He stayed at the Grand Hotel. In that region there were twenty mines out of which twelve were owned by the government and eight were privately owned. The total employment was 30,000. Coal was then exported to England in exchange for English textiles. Chhaganbapa was particularly interested in this country. He saw the beautiful houses of the workers, the healthy children playing in the gardens in front of the houses, beautiful trees lined up on both sides of the streets, such gardens everywhere, and a public bath where two thousand five hundred people could take bath simultaneously. While seeing the life of the mine-workers of Holland, Bapa would think of the life of the mine-workers in India, and he would feel sad.

During the journey Bapa made many friends. From Holland he went back to London and from there left for India. Throughout his tour



Shri Ratilal Parekh, elder son of Shri Chhaganbapa is having a look at the day to day working of the Institution on his visit to the Bandra Centre.



of Europe, Bapa strictly adhered to his simple and modest life style. He did not make any changes, whatsoever, in his diet, daily routine and mode of day-to-day worship. On his return he was felicitated in Calcutta, Jharla and Dhanbad.

CHAPTER — X

THE MOMENT OF JOY AND FULFILMENT

Chhaganbapa was anxiously waiting for this auspicious day to be dawned. On this day he was going to retire. For Bapa this was a day of great joy and fulfilment. Bapa had resolved in 1939 in the month of May that he would retire exactly after 10 years on 29th June 1949. But Bapa wanted to advance the day by six months if he could. In those days Bapa's income was on the increase. He was then the partner in seven mines. In addition, he was earning good commission on the sales of coal. His annual income had gone beyond Rs. 75,000/-. He had all the so-called means of material happiness. Although he was born in a middle class family he attained success in business through the grace of God. His health was excellent. His family life was happy. He had educated his two sons. They were married and settled. Thus, Chhaganbapa was happy in all respects yet, he was committed towards goal of self realisation. Ordinary pleasures of life did not mean anything to him. He had before him the example of great souls like Sirdharth and Gopichand Bhartruhari. The lives of Mahatma Gandhi and Thakkarbapa had made a deep impression on the mind of Chhaganbapa.

Chhaganbapa had intense craving for self-revelation. Therefore, he was anxious to translate his resolution into practice.

Life was overflowing with happiness and no one was conscious of the passage of time. Several years had passed like a few moments. Bapa himself writes about his experience.

"Once I looked into my diary and realised that the day of renunciation had come very close. As King Dasharath had become aware of his old age when he saw his hair graying, I heard the bells of Time chiming as I looked into my diary. It was as if Time was saying — 'Wake up and be prepared. The time has now come for you to implement your resolution.' I saw that the day of great moment in my life was only a year ahead."

Chhaganbapa called his wife and sons and read out his 'Declaration'. They asked, "Our business has now expanded and your responsibilities have multiplied. How can you abandon everything and think of retirement?"

Chhaganbapa replied, "I have clearly stated in my 'Declaration' that I shall retire from my professional and business life under any circumstances, favourable or adverse. Therefore, consider these words as my advance 'notice' to you. If you want to know anything about my business and related matter, this is the time to do so. There are only six months at your disposal. After that I am as good as dead. I shall have no

concern with the profession and business. I shall not be able to tell you anything at that stage. My lips will then be completely sealed."

Bapa's sons asked hesitatingly, "How can you suddenly seal your lips like that? What is wrong in guiding us in these matters as long as you are alive?" Bapa said, "There is nothing wrong. But please try to realise that my economic life will be over after that day. Postulate that I am dead as far as these matters are concerned. You can't after all ask these questions to a 'dead' man! You must take your own decisions and make your own choice." Bapa's sons were wise and of religious nature. So was Bapa's wife. They immediately appreciated Bapa's point. They asked Bapa about all that had to be known regarding business. Having entrusted his roaring business to his sons, Bapa retired.

The day Bapa decided to quit business, his transactions had expanded enormously. His monthly income had increased from Rs. 4,000/- to Rs. 6000/- (i.e. Rs. 30,000 to the present value of Rupee). But Bapa did not hesitate a bit. In the December of 1948 he retired.

Bapa started on a year long pilgrimage of the Holy places to prepare himself for the new life. He visited Kashi, Mathura, Gokul, Vrindavan, Haradwar, Rishikesh and finally landed in Baroda. He then decided to attain inner purity through the observance of fast and silence.

Around that time Bapa happened to read a news item in the newspaper i.e. "Thakkarbappa was felicitated on the completion of 70 years of his life. Great leaders of the nation like Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Dr. Rajendra Prasad expressed their respect and admiration for Thakkarbappa at this function." Bapa thought, "Here is a selfless and unassuming man, a man full of humility and simplicity. I must go to this man, sit at his feet and serve him." Bapa decided to go to Thakkarbappa.

CHAPTER XI

AT THE FEET OF THAKKARBAPPA

Noble thoughts and ideas accrue to everybody. Everyone in his youth entertain high ideals and beautiful dreams of future life. However, few possess the resoluteness to stick by these ideals and dreams and to put precepts into practice. Chhaganbapa was one of such rare persons. He thought that he should devote himself to the service of a righteous person like Thakkarbappa, and immediately acted accordingly. He wrote to Thakkarbappa. In his letter he mentioned about this 'Declaration, his plan for the future, and his desire to devote himself to religious and social work. He requested Thakkarbappa to give guidance. His last sentence was "Give me direction as to how I should lead my future life."

Chhaganbapa felt free and relaxed after he had posted the letter. He received an immediate reply. He had not expected to get such a prompt response. The letter read "Come over to Delhi so that we can talk things over. I can give you guidance only after learning about you from yourself."

Chhaganbapa was extremely happy. He immediately went to Delhi. Thakkarbappa was

then working as a Secretary of Harijan Sevak Sangh. Shri Harkhchand Motichand Shah had come to the station to receive him. He took Chhaganbappa to the office of Harijan Sevak Sangh.

In the afternoon of that day Chhaganbappa went to meet Thakkarbappa. Thakkarbappa heard everything. When he was shown the 'Declaration' written nine-and-a-half years ago. Thakkarbappa was highly surprised. He said, "I have not seen anyone who seriously implements the decision he had made nine-and-a-half years ago. You have done the right thing. You can now stay with me and help me in my work. Once you start you will easily know what is to be done."

After the preliminary talk, "Thakkarbappa asked him about his habit and requirements. Chhaganbappa replied, "I do not have any particular habit. I get up at 4 O'Clock in the morning, meditate for a while and read a little from Geeta and other religious books. After that I am willing to do whatever you suggest." Thakkarbappa said "Very good."

From that day onwards Chhaganbappa began to live with Thakkarbappa in Delhi. Thakkarbappa would get up at 4 in the morning. Shri Harakhchandbhaj would be at his service. He would prepare coffee for Thakkarbappa. Harakh-

chandbhai would handle Thakkarbappa's correspondence. In the meanwhile Chaganbapa would complete his daily morning routine and be at the service of Thakkarbappa exactly at 6 O'Clock to relieve Harakhchandbhai.

After six. Chhaganbapa would read out loudly daily newspaper to Thakkarbappa, write letters for him or accompany him at the meetings. After the meetings he would do some reading and writing or write accounts and make notes in the diary. Thus, the work would go on till 10 in the night. Thakkarbappa would go to bed at 10 O'Clock and then Chhaganbapa also would go to bed.

After a few such days Thakkarbappa asked: "what is your plan now?" Chhaganbapa said, "Bapa you already know about my plan from the letter that I had written to you. As I had mentioned in my declaration, I want to devote my life to religious and social work. I intend to dedicate my life finally to the service of God but not immediately. For the two months I wish to observe 'kashtamaun-Vrata' Then I have planned to go to Kumbh pilgrimage with my wife. After that I am willing to do whatever you suggest."

Thakkarbappa asked, "Do you prefer to take up active path or passive path of devotion?" Chhaganbapa replied, "I want to take up constructive work selflessly. I do not have any desire

himself. "What does it matter if the body is destroyed? What's wrong laying down one's life in the sacred land on the bank of the Ganges? What's left for me to be done in life? My wife and children are happy, and they have no problems. The body is going to be destroyed sooner or later but the soul is immortal." With these thoughts he regained his courage and confidence, and spent whole night without sleeping.

The next day was the day of 'Ekadashi. He washed his hands and feet with cold water. He still had a little chest-pain and a headache. He made a note of all the thoughts that had come into his mind at night. He offered fresh flowers to God. At 9 in the morning he had a little milk and began his chant of 'Hare Ram'. He realised the importance of chanting the name of God.

At the end of thirtyeight days of 'Kashtha. maun Vrata' Chhaganbapa's chest-pain became unbearable due to frequent rain, high wind and severe cold. The spirit was willing but the body was weak. Chhaganbapa was 'not, afterall, a 'Hathayogi'. He was a man of descretion. He carefully thought over the situation and decided to stop his Vrata.

Thus Chhaganbapa passed through a great experiment of his life. After giving up the vrata he went to Haridwar where he received medical treatment. After some recovery, he wrote to

Thakkarbappa that he had accepted 'Pravruthi-marga' (Active path of 'devotion) and that he would be returning to Delhi affter April.

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE MOUNTAINOUS LAND OF THE NORTH INDIA

In the month of April in 1950, as Chhaganbapa was convalescing at Haridwar, he received a telegram saying "Thakkarbappa not well, come immediately." Chhaganbapa came to Delhi.

He met Thakkarbappa and enquired about his health. Thakkarbappa asked him, "How do you find me?" Chhaganbapa replied, "You look a little weak." Thakkarbappa smiled a little and said, "Chhaganbapa, I shall be going to Bhavnagar next week and from there to Poona. I shall return in the third week of April. Then we shall stay together." "What path have you chosen?" he then asked. Chhaganbapa said, "I have chosen the path of service and work. I want to serve mankind and to do anything that you ask me to do. I completely surrender myself to you." Thakkarbappa was satisfied. He said, "For the first four months you'll have to do a lot of travelling. There are a number of places which I cannot visit. You can go there. It would be better if you start before the monsoon starts. Collect information wherever you go. You'll then know the kind of help that is needed at different places. In your journey through Himalayas

ॐ शुद्ध मनः वदन् वदन् पुस्तकालय ॐ

51

आगत क्रमांक..... 1704.....

दिनांक.....

Dharmadev Shastri of the Ashok Ashram of Kalsi will accompany you. Visit Kinnarpradesh, Gadhwal, Nainital, and Almoda. Render temporary help if needed to people in those places." Chhaganbapa said, "I shall follow your instructions."

After a few days of stay in Delhi, Chhaganbapa started the journey of the Himalayas. He prepared the detailed plan of the journey with the help of Dharmadev Shastri. Before he could begin the journey he came to know that Thakkarbappa was seriously ill. He left for Bhavnagar immediately.

Thakkarbappa was staying with his brother, Dr. Keshavlal Thakkar. Chhaganbapa went to his place and met Thakkarbappa. Thakkarbappa enquired about everyone's health. He was looking very weak. It was through sheer will-power that he was alive. He would go through the daily post and would listen to the news read out to him, in spite of his illness. Famous Hindi poet Shri Viyogi Hari had come from Delhi. He said to Chhaganbapa, "Only the blessings of the Almighty can save Bapa."

Thakkarbappa never liked anyone abandoning his work in order to see him due to his illness. He asked Chhaganbapa, "What's your programme?" Chhaganbapa said, "I shall let you know tomorrow."

The next day, Harakhchandbhai said to Thakkarbappa, "I shall ask Chhaganbapa to stay on if you so wish, or else, he will proceed for Kalsi. Thakkarbappa replied, "Everyone should resume their work and give up their attachment to me."

Chhaganbapa said, "It is possible to give up the attachment to the family and friends. But how can a servant give up his attachment to the master?" Thakkarbappa was quietly listening. Harakhchandbhai said, "Kindly give guidance and instructions to Chhaganbapa about his tasks in the event of your departure from this world."

Thakkarbappa said, "Chhaganbapa is hard-working and full of enthusiasm. He need not be told anything. God will help him in his work. I wish that he should devote himself to public service."

Chhaganbapa booked his ticket for the next day. He felt unhappy about departing from Thakkarbappa in his present state of health. But Thakkarbappa had himself ordered everyone to resume his work. That day Chhaganbapa read out the letters to Thakkarbappa and wrote replies as suggested by him. He read out few paragraphs from Ramayana and spent the whole day at the bedside of Thakkarbappa. In the evening he visited the temple of Takteshwar Mahadeo.

The next day Chhaganbapa took leave of Thakkarbappa with a heavy heart and went to

the station. On the station he met Shri Dahya-bhai Nayak and Shri Parikshitbhai Mazumdar. As he left Bhavnagar his mind was pre-occupied with only one worry, that is whether he would be able to see Thakkarbappa again at all.

Mountaineers from all over the world come to India and organize expeditions to scale the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas. Such expeditions are preceded by considerable advance preparation. Mountaineering is a test of courage and spirit of adventure. Successful mountaineers acquire fame and glory. Chhaganbapa's journey through the Himalayas was however, of a different sort. He was going to the Himalayas to study the life of local people who lived in remote areas away from the civilised world and to extend them help to the extent possible.

Chhaganbapa left Ashokashrama along with Shri Dharmdev Shastri on 7-5-1950 for Saharanpur. From there, he proceeded towards Simla, via Ambala and Kalka. At 12-00 in the night he arrived in Simla. Then he walked down to the house of Shri Sureshwarilal Kapoor which was about one and a half miles away from Simla Station. Shri Sureshwarilal Kapoor and his wife, Padmadevi were extremely hospitable. They were very happy to receive him. From the information that he gathered about the place through Shri Kapoor, Chhaganbapa realised that the mission, he has undertaken is not an easy one. No

social worker had ventured to go to that region before Chhaganbapa. That is precisely why Thakkarbappa had chosen him for the purpose, he now well understood.

.....This region was almost untouched by the changes which had taken place in the rest of the country as a result of the achievement of independence. These inhabitants of the mountainous region appeared to be living in a world of their own. They did not get any facilities from the State by way of education, health and security. Government officials were behaving like heavenly Gods in this place. The system of Zamindari prevailed everywhere in the region. Small peasantry lived almost like slaves. System of women being forced to marry with more than one husband was practised widely and their conditions were worse than those of slaves. There were no facilities for the education of children nor were there any means of transport and communication.

Chhaganbapa carefully observed everything. He began to note down the grievances of the people against the Zamindars. He met the Executive Engineers and the Education Officer in connection with the construction of a school. He made a list of the new schools which would have had to be set up in that area. It was decided that an 'Ashram' should be set up at a small village named Fagu. He also had a talk with the

Government officials about the establishment of a Maternity Hospital.

The next day Chhaganbapa prepared his programme of further travel and work. Chhaganbapa took upon himself the responsibility of travelling from Shastriji. Although Shastriji was affectionate, knowledgeable, courageous, hard-working and service oriented he was not much practical — minded. Chhaganbapa proved to be complementary to Shastriji.

Chhaganbapa secured a detailed map of the Himalayan region, made elaborate notes of mileage, Rest Houses, Hotels and Dak Bunglows. 'Narkunda' is 39 miles away from 'Simla'. He obtained the permit to go to Narkunda. An Engineer from the Construction Department warned that it would be impossible to get vegetables and milk in that area. But Shastriji and Chhaganbapa embarked on their journey. They went from Simla to Narkunda by bus.

The village of Narkunda is situated at the height of 9000 feet above the sea level. Roads are very narrow and in a very bad condition. If the driver is not careful enough there is always a risk of falling into the deep valley. There was one Tourist Hotel in Narkunda village. Shastriji and Chhaganbapa stayed in that hotel. The people of the village were used to consume a lot of liquor. There was a liquor distillery near the school. There were no food-

grains available at the Government ration shop. The headmaster of the school came to meet them and also made the provision for their meals. The system of foodgrains distribution through ration shops in the village as well as facility for education appeared to be far from adequate. A woman complained that salt was being sold at the rate of six annas a seer and that adequate ration was not available. The shopkeeper, when asked for an explanation said that the foodgrains have already arrived in the village but that the Tahsildar had not issued an order to release the stocks. Bapa insisted that the shopkeeper should get the order issued immediately from the Tahsildar.

From Narkunda, Shastriji and Bapa went to a village called 'Malain.' The people of the village eagerly gathered together. They also complained about the ration. A family used to get 5 seers of gram as a weekly ration. But that too had stopped for sometime and the village folk were forced to live on leaves of trees. A woman came and showed how weak her three children had become due to starvation. The village had not had a good crop that year and the peasants had become impoverished. There was a school in the village. But no parents sent their children to the school. When asked as to why the children were not sent to the school, people pointed out that they could not afford

the expenses of books, slates and pencils. Chhaganbapa was extremely moved by this. He bought 7 seers of dal and distributed it among the people. But he was not satisfied with that. He sent telegrams to Dr. Rajendrababu President of India and to the Chief Commissioner. A meeting of the farmers and the harijans was held in the school. Chhaganbapa heard the grievances of the people and gave them assurances that he would look into them. The question of starting a night school and a school for girls was discussed with Shri Devakinandan, the headmaster of the school. The discussion went on till late in the night.

The next day a small get-together was arranged in the school. Teachers, pupils and several local people were present. The Education officer of the region was also present. Shastriji and Chhaganbapa made speeches. In their speeches they told the people about things which they had never heard about. The people felt relieved. They were happy to know that at last there were some people who cared for them and were trying to solve their problems.

From 'Narkunda' they went to Ravada Via Shergadh. The only means of transport in that area, were 'mules'. The walking alley was very steep and there was a deep valley below. The journey was indeed dangerous. There was a big crowd of people waiting for them at 'Ravada'.

The conditions of food distribution and education were equally bad there too. The farmers had very small holdings and they had not had a harvest that year. There were no facilities of implements, seeds or fertilisers. People had no other alternative occupation. In spite of their tragic condition they organised folk dance to entertain the visitors. Chhaganbapa and Shastriji were very happy to watch their dances. Then, Chhaganbapa told the teachers and the officials who were present there "Efforts must be made to bring about a rapid improvement of the conditions of these people. That is precisely why we have been sent here by Thakkarbappa." The journey of six miles from Ravada village to the Dak Bungalow at other place was rough. They met some more people at the bungalow and had discussions with the government officials.

This is how the journey went on to far flung places. Mountain people lived in small hamlets in the hilly areas. Every 5 or 7 miles there would be a slightly bigger village. There would be a school and a Dak Bungalow. In some village even the government servants would find it difficult to live there. Chhaganbapa noted all the complaints of the people regarding the ration etc. and sent them to the Commissioner.

Along the road there were small hamlets of the 'Kinner' tribes. Their occupation was rearing sheep and goats, mules and horses. During win-

ter, they would go far off hotter regions to trade in these animals in the open grounds. In the summer they would live in the mountains.

After great many difficulties and at a considerable risk Shastriji and Chhaganbapa arrived in a border village of "Chini." There was one school and a dispensary in the village. This village is on the border which divides India and Tibet. The last out-post of the Government of India is in the 'Chini'. There were 20 policemen and one inspector in the out-post. Chhaganbapa had to cover a distance of 17 miles on a steep and bad road to come to Chini. He stayed in the Rest House of the Forest Department. The gardener had made good arrangements for their stay in the Rest House. He gave some apples to Chhaganbapa. The village of Chini is situated at the height of 9000 feet above the sea level. Due to the cold climate fruits remain fresh for several days. The Chowkidar of the Rest House Shri Pratapsingh was a nice person. He made arrangements for food etc.

The next day morning Shri Janamdeo Shastri, the school teacher, came to meet them. He said, "In the months of winter the school remains closed for two and a half months due to severe cold. The supply of foodgrains is not adequate. Fruits like Naspati, Apple, Mevza and grapes are grown here, but the fruits are not sold here."

There was one hostel in the village school. There were thirtyone students living in the hostel. The bulk of the population of the village consisted of the 'Kinner' people. Bapa made a suggestion that 'Kinner Seva Sangh' should be established in the village. He also assured that the expenses of one worker for the first year would be met by Ashok Ashram. This would also include the expenses of stationery and printing etc. There were about 600 harijans living in the area. Bapa made a note of their conditions.

In this region many small villages were situated in deep forests on the high mountains. It was rare to come across schools in such villages. There was hardly any dispensary or medical facility anywhere. The oppression and the exploitation of the Zamindars made life miserable for the village folk. Chhaganbapa and Shastriji went round places collecting information. Wherever horses were not convenient they would go on foot. They would send telegrams to the relevant government officials and inform them about the irregularities in the rationing system. They wrote to the Commissioner requesting him to enquire into the cases of injustice and oppression where Zamindars and government officials were involved. Similarly, they sent reports of their visits to the newspapers.

....

Chhaganbapa was constantly in touch with Thakkarbappa through correspondence. Shri

Harakhchandbhai used to inform him about Thakkarbappa's health. In spite of his old age and bad health he would enquire about the conditions of the poor people and the tribals. Chhaganbapa was inspired by the enthusiasm and keenness of Thakkarbappa. Thakkarbappa had written in one of his letters. "If I were young, I would have gone to the Himachal Pradesh, situated 9000 feet above the sea level. But now instead of me Shastriji, Parekh and Rangaiyya have to go there."

Thakkarbappa's article entitled "Land of the Kinner" was published in 'Hindustan Times'. In that article Thakkarbappa had given an account of the visit of Shastriji and Chhaganbapa to this area. He had also suggested to the government that schools, dispensaries and service-centres should be opened in this area. He had also written a separate letter to Shri Vallabhabhai Patel in this connection.

As a result of the visits of Chhaganbapa and Shastriji to Himachal Pradesh, there emerged a sort of an awakening among the people of that area. In midst of their tour the rainy season started. But despite all kinds of odds Chhaganbapa completed the entire journey. They visited the districts of 'Mandi' and 'Chamba' and studied the life of the people, prepared an elaborate report substantiated by statistical data, sent it to the authorities concerned and to the newspapers,

and disposed of several matters with the help of the district collectors.

From 'Chamba' they proceeded to Dalhousi by bus. From there they arrived at Saharanpur via Pathankot, Amritsar and Ambala. Thereafter Shastriji left for Dehradun and Chhaganbapa went to Haridwar.

By this time, the month of 'Shravana' had started. Chhaganbapa began a fast of 21 days. In the meanwhile there was an earthquake in Assam. A dam burst and the whole region was washed out by a flood. Thousands of people became the victims of this disaster. Chhaganbapa received an urgent message from Thakkarbappa to proceed to the flood affected area and he began preparations to go to Assam.

CHAPTER XIV

FLOOD RELIEF WORK IN ASSAM

In the year 1950 the people of Assam became victims of a great disaster. Hundreds of villages were washed out by the floods and thousands of people were rendered homeless. About one-third of the population of Assam was affected by this natural calamity. The whole of India rose to the occasion and food, clothes and medicines began to flow into Assam from all parts of the country. When Chhaganbapa went to Assam several other selfless workers had already arrived there. The 'Governor of Assam, Shri Jayramdas Daulatram was a well-known disciple of Gandhiji and a great patriot. He had reverence for Chhaganbapa who in response to Thakkarbappa's request, had gone to Assam to render help in the relief work. The Chief Minister of Assam, Shri Medhi and the Chief Officials of the relief programme were highly impressed by Chhaganbapa's work. They were astonished by Chhaganbapa's efficiency, enthusiasm and endurance.

Thakkarbapa had already informed the Governor of Assam in a letter that Shri Chhaganbhai Parekh is a devoted and selfless worker with experience of an efficient business-

man, and that he would be very useful in procuring supplies of all kinds of essential goods. Accordingly, Chhaganbapa was entrusted with the job of procuring supplies of various goods. The goods had to be swiftly moved into the affected areas through all the possible means of transport -aircrafts, boats and railways. This was a very difficult job. Bapa would personally handle every small detail of the job. He would acquire the permits, wagons and the other things for this purpose. He would give his words of love and encouragement to the lowest category of the workers, explain to them the importance of their work and get the work done quickly. For this he would work almost round the clock.

Military personnel and the government officials were also working very hard. Many other people such as the monks of Ramkrishna Mission, the members of Marawadi Relief Committee and of other relief committees were deeply involved in this work. Chhaganbapa was in close contact with all these people. The relief work of Assam went on for several months. Chhaganbapa had fully immersed himself in this work.

The following account from Chhaganbapa's diary is the proof of the fact that the Governor of Assam and other held him in great reverence

"1-10-50, got up in the morning at 4.30 a.m. Went to the 'Dumdum' airport with Captain L. N. Rao. Friends and acquaintances had come

to the airport to see me off. Arrived in Gohatti at 9.30 A.M., was received by a group of friends. Arrived in Shillong at 12.30, was received by the Governor and some government officials. Had long discussions with them and went to bed late at night."

"6-10-50. Sat down for prayers after the early morning bath. Shri Jayaramdas came. He said, "We have to bring cloth. Will your son Mulchand take the delivery in Calcutta?" I replied that he should not. I would like to go to Calcutta myself. I shall arrange the goods to be sent by railway or by air. It is Thakkarbappa's order that I should do this work personally from Calcutta."

The Governor of Assam readily accepted Chhaganbapa's proposal. He, in consultation with Shri Medhi, the Chief Minister of Assam, appointed Chhaganbapa as a member of the Flood Relief Committee.

The next day Chhaganbapa was invited by the Governor to a tea party where the flood relief programme was discussed.

Chhaganbapa sent a telegram to the Chief Minister of Bengal, Dr. B. C. Roy, and asked him to send 1200 maunds of oil to Lakhimpur. He got Rs. 2,000/- from Hirachandbhai Shah and decided to buy aluminium utensils to distribute at cost-price to 1500 families. Dr. Roy wrote a letter to Bapa asking him to distribute medicines

at cost-price. Chhaganbapa suggested that concession should be granted in the freight charges of the railways. It was decided that Shri Dahyabhai Nayak and Shri Rao should remain at Dibrugadh and Shillong Centres while Chhaganbapa should continue to stay in Calcutta.

Accounts of the receipts and the expenditure of the Committee had to be maintained. Bapa saw to it that the accounts were properly checked and regulated. Bapa would sit late in the night and prepare receipts for the money orders received. One night the Governor came to meet Bapa. He said, "It's very late in the night, you must go to bed." Chhaganbapa replied, "I can sleep well only after I have finished the day's work." Everyday about 300 money orders would be received. Bapa would single-handedly do the job of issuing receipts for the money orders.

Once there was a meeting of the Relief Committee. The Chief Minister of Assam was in the chair and the Governor was present at the meeting. The scheme of relief work prepared by Chhaganbapa and Dahyabhai Nayak was submitted for consideration. The regions of Mizmi and Abbot Hill were the most affected areas. It was decided that Rs. 10 lakhs be set aside for this region. A scheme to provide clothing, shelter and potato seeds to about 15,000 families was chalked out and a tentative budget of the scheme

was presented to the committee for sanction. It was decided that Chhaganbapa should make arrangement for the supplies of goods from Calcutta. Accordingly, Chhaganbapa went to Culcutta. Bapa had a wide circle of friends and acquaintances. he made use of his connections to arrange the swift transport of goods by railway and by air. This was a difficult job and Bapa had to exert himself much more than he had ever done before. He collected a number of things besides cash for the Relief Fund from his friends. Bapa would take keen interest in every small detail of this work. It was a very difficult job to send items like utensils, blankets, clothes, construction materials, metal sheets for roofing, tents, etc., to distant places without delay. The transport and communication system in the area had become completely disorganized. Roads were in petty bad shape. In such a situation Bapa had no alternative but to send goods by air.

When Bapa went to Calcutta, this work of transporting goods to Assam went on day after day, from the early hours of morning till late into the night. The year 1950 came to an end. The new year began. On the new year's day, when Jesus Christ gave to the world his message of love and service, Chhaganbapa wrote in his diary "Met the Chief Officer Mr. Arora. Made a request to send 3000 tons of metal sheets. Arranged for a special goods train. Trying to send rice, metal sheets, cement and cloth."

Whenever Chhaganbapa approached people for help, he received immediately either in cash or in kind. Once a friend came from Jharia. He said, "I shall donate to the relief fund on the condition that you get me government subsidy for filling sand in the coal mines. "But Bapa was totally against such 'conditional' help. He clearly said, "I have given up the business transactions long back. I shall never allow such transactions to enter into the Relief Fund work."

Thakkarbappa was continuously kept informed about the activities of Assam Relief Work. But his health was fast deteriorating day after day. On 19-1-51 Chhaganbapa received a telegram from Harakhchandbhai "Bapa is serious." Chhaganbapa immediately went to the airport but could not get a ticket. He returned home disappointed. The next day, on 20th January 1951 he read the sad news of Thakkarbappa's demise in the newspaper. Chhaganbapa was terribly shocked by this news. He wrote letters of consolation to the friends and relatives of Thakkarbappa. On 25th, a meeting of condolence was held in Calcutta. For several days later Chhaganbapa would constantly think of Thakkarbappa. Then he kept himself busy with the Assam Flood Relief Work. He would pray everyday "Oh God! give me the strength to go along the path shown by 'Thakkarbappa.'"

When the work of sending goods from Calcutta became relatively easier, Chhaganbapa started going to the flood affected areas. On 25th February he reached Gohatti. From there he visited places like Dibrugadh, Sadia, Teju, Dinang and Soukahaghat. The entire area was covered with sheet of water. One had to cross rivers to go from one place to another. Chhaganbapa, Dahyabhai Nayak and others did the work of transporting clothes, blankets, food-stuffs and construction materials into this area, at the risk of their lives. This work went on till the end of July. By the grace of God these victims of a natural calamity received help from all directions. On 5th July, 1951, the Governor of Assam, Shri Jayaramdas organised a tea party for the workers and volunteers. The Chief Minister of Assam and the senior officials of the government were present at the party. On this occasion Shri Medhi said, "The work done by the colleagues of Thakkarbappa is indeed great. The people of Assam will always be grateful to them." The Governor said to the representatives of the press, "The history of the work done by various volunteers after the earthquake in Assam is indeed a glorious and will have to be written in golden letters." He expressed his heartfelt thanks and accorded a warm fare-well to all.

During this work in Assam, Chhaganbapa made a number of friends. Among them Mr. Chandubhai Dalal came particularly close to

Bapa. It is said "Everyone would come to set up a pandal for function but no one stay behind to dismantle it when function is over". The same thing happened after the Assam Relief work. In matters of account Chhaganbapa gave a lot of importance to honesty and tidiness, just as Bapuji and Thakkarbappa did. Chandubhai has noted his experience about it. "As days passed the work of the Relief Committee became gradually smaller. Ultimately, when the work was about to come to an end, a complication arose. The accounts of the money sent to various places were far from adequate. The local workers recipients of aid in money or in kind, rarely maintained any accounts. Particularly in the distant north-eastern part of Assam, at the centre in Sadia village, the irregularities of accounts were considerable. Even the government officials (through whom the aid was sent) did not pay any heed to the directives."

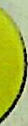
"During this work, I cannot recall Chhaganbapa ever having said that he would like to do only a certain type of work. He would, on the contrary, say "I shall do whatever you tell me to do! In March 1951, Mr. Rao, a worker from Sadia region went on leave. Chhaganbapa went to Sadia in his place. The situation was extremely tense there. Dahyabhai and Chhaganbapa did not know what to do. But within a few days the whole work was smoothly ironed out by Chhaganbapa. Accounts were settled. Even the

government officials of Sadia have, in their reports, praised the work of Chhaganbapa.

"The work was coming to an end and the day of departure was approaching but Chhaganbapa did not allow any sloppiness to enter his work. People liked him very much for his generosity and sympathetic attitude. Hence Chhaganbapa's stay was extended. The members of his family in Calcutta were worried. They would make trunk calls now and then. But Chhaganbapa did not hasten his departure. Dahyabhai, in his letter to his son had written, "I shall not return without Chhaganbhai". At last Chhaganbapa came to Dibrugadh and on 5th of July, 1951, with all the others he left for Shilong.



Shri Chhaganbapa is crossing the swollen Brahmaputra river on makeshift boat made from seal animal's skin, for the purpose of providing succour to the flood-affected people in inaccessible areas.



CHAPTER XV

GUJARAT BHAVAN OF HARIDWAR

The Himalaya is of exceptional significance to India. The Himalaya is like a father to India, a father who looks after and protects. Our country has become beautiful like Nandanvan because of this great mountain. Himalaya is a source of great 'rivers like the Ganges, the Jamuna, the Sindhu, the Satlaj, the Chinab' the Ravi, the Zelum, the Brahmaputra and the Irawati. Haridwar is known as the Gateway of the Himalayas. It is also known as a Gate of Heaven' The striking features of Haridwar are the beautiful banks of the river Ganges, the temples, Dharmashalas and the streets filled with pilgrims, the safron coloured flags of the Sadhus.

Every evening in the waters of the river Ganges at Harikipaudi thousands of lamps float which give an impression that the star studded sky has descended on the earth. The bells chime in the temples like the sounds of the collision of clouds. At such a time when thousands of pilgrims participate in resounding prayer to the mother Ganges, the atmosphere, as if it is felt become changed with the presence of the super-natural and the divine. The pilgrims for a moment cease to be aware of their physical

existence, as if the very heaven descends to the earth.

Chhaganbapa had a deep attraction for the Himalaya, as if the Himalayas constantly beckoned to Chhaganbapa. Every year Chhaganbapa would spend at least a month on the Himalayas. He would observe his fast in the month of Shravana here. He would experience unparalleled peace of mind at this place. He would share this experience with his friends. Chhaganbapa's friends cherish these memories this day and are emotionally overwhelmed when they recall their experiences.

Thousands of pilgrims come from Gujarat to a place of pilgrimage like Haridwar every year. There was no place in Haridwar where these people could stay and have peace of mind for a few days. Chhaganbapa was aware of this problem. He decided to establish a Dharmashala with all kinds of facilities for the pilgrims of Gujarat and other places. Once Chhaganbapa decided to do a certain thing he would not be satisfied until he had done it. In his dictionary 'Good thought' and 'Good deed' were synonymous. To bring uniformity between 'thought' and 'action' can be said to be the guiding principle of his whole life.

Chhaganbapa decided to undertake the project of Gujarat Bhavan. He chalked out the blueprint of the project and proceeded to implement

it. As soon as he became free from the work of Assam Flood Relief, he took up the work of Gujarat Bhavan. In his project there was a scheme that everyone who donated more than Rs. 2500/- would get his name inscribed on the board outside a room. On the 2nd August 1951 he went from Calcutta to Haridwar via Delhi to form a trust of Gujarat Bhavan. That was the first day of his fast in the month of Shravana in which he was to observe fast for twenty one days. On such an auspicious day he made a beginning of an auspicious project. In this project he received the co-operation of a devout couple i.e. Shri Karsandas Joshi and his wife Smt. Sakarben. The two of them had been staying at Haridwar as 'Vanaprasthi' (retired people). The co-operation of this pious couple was invaluable in the task of the establishment of Gujarat Bhavan. Smt. Sakarben was very helpful in the management of Gujarat Bhavan. Shri Karsanbhai was popularly known among the people as 'Bhagatji' (devout singer). The work of Gujarat Bhavan started under the able guidance and leadership of Chhaganbapa. The three floors were constructed within a short period of time for which Chhaganbapa had to put in a lot of hard work. Whenever Bapa undertook to do anything he saw to it that it was completed. Naturally, he had to work day and night. Chhaganbapa was personally involved in all types of work such as the preparation of plans, mobilising the masons, carpenters, plumbers

acquiring various permits, etc. Every alternate day he had to go to Saharanpur to obtain permission from the Municipality for water and electricity supply connection etc. Bapa was bent upon completing the project within the schedule period of time. He never considered it below his dignity to meet even the ordinary clerk. The officers would do his work the moment they saw him.

Thus, as a result of the capable leadership and organising capacity of Chhaganbapa the huge building of Gujarat Bhavan was finally ready. The building is equipped with all amenities for the benefit of the pilgrims. The bathrooms and latrines are built with a due consideration for hygiene and cleanliness. The pilgrims can avail themselves of various facilities such as utensils, fans, bedding etc. The total number of rooms in Gujarat Bhavan were fiftytwo. That is why Chhaganbapa used to say to Sakerben in humour "we have made palace of playing cards!"

There is a widespread belief among the people that those who live at the place of pilgrimage on the banks of the river Ganges in Haridwar, become immortal. Chhaganbapa proved that belief to be true. Whenever he visited Haridwar to observe his fast in the month of Shravana he would read religious books such as Shreemad Bhagwat and Ramayan. His daily routine would be similar to that of a "Sadhaka." He would get up in the early hours at dawn and perform all

the religious rituals. Then he would write his diary, read newspapers and write letters. During the days of his fast he would recite from the religious books for two hours in the morning and in the evening in Gujarat Bhavan. At night there would be a programme of devotional music and religious discourses. Sometimes there would be a get together of religious devotees.

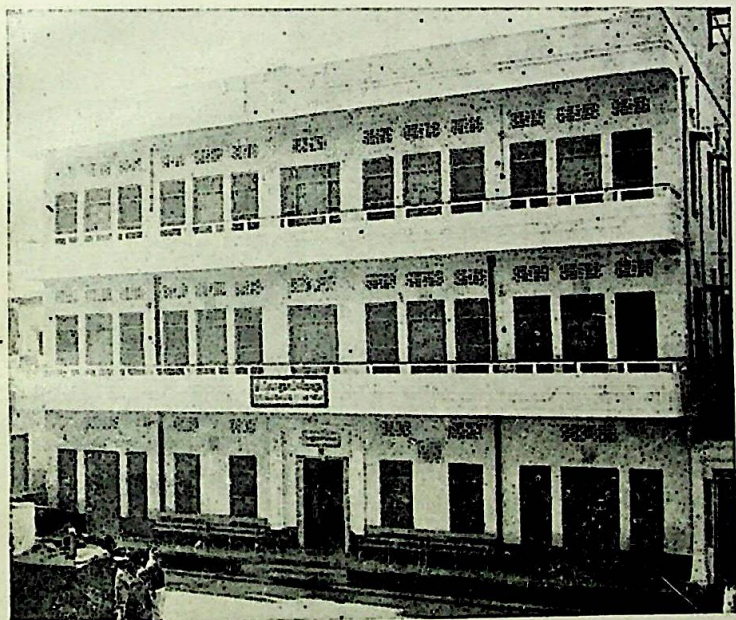
Chhaganbapa had a very wide circle of friends and acquaintances. Gujarat Bhavan was, therefore, always full of people. The responsibility of making arrangements for Bapa's guests would naturally fall on the shoulders of Smt. Maniben which she would willingly carry out. Making arrangements for guests' stay in Gujarat Bhavan was a matter of great joy to her.

Chhaganbapa, who had entered the Vanprasthashrama, lived a life of a liberated man on the banks of river Ganges. He had abandoned all sense of attachments to wealth, family and friends and to his physical self. He had abandoned all fear and anxiety. While enumerating the characteristics of a liberated man, Lord Krishna says in Shreemad Bhagwatgeeta.

(Those who are able to transcend the conflicts of attachment and hatred, joy and sorrow, desire and anger, and lust and temptation are really liberated persons.)

People had seen for themselves how Chhaganbapa underwent the ordeal of 'Kashta-

maun Vrata' and how he led the life of a 'Karmayogi'. His contemporaries were indeed fortunate to be blessed by the presence of such a great liberated soul.



'Gujarat Bhavan', the main building of the Dharmashala built by the efforts of Shri Chhaganbapa for the pilgrims coming at Haridwar (U.P.)



CHAPTER XVI

LOHANA CONFERENCE, BOMBAY

Mahatma Gandhi would often say that a Satyagrahi should never go in search of an opportunity to serve but whatever assignment comes to him automatically he must fulfil it with a sense of duty. This applies to Chhaganbapa's life as well. Just as the work of Gujarat Bhavan was nearing completion, Bapa received a message that the conference of Lohana Community was proposed to be held in Bombay and that Bapa must render his invaluable assistance. Bapa came to Bombay on the 1st of October 1952 for the work of Mahaparishad in response to the persistent request of his friends. His arrival in Bombay infused additional enthusiasm into the work of preparation for the conference. Chhaganbapa was able to attract several men and women. Ordinarily the conference involves speeches, resolutions, deliberations, refreshments and entertainments. However, Chhaganbapa's aim was to use this conference in order to set up a few new organizations. He tried to guide the active workers in this direction. He sincerely thought that the area of activity of this conference should not be confined merely to the Lohana Community but that should be broad enough to

include the welfare and the progress of the society as a whole.

The preparation for the Mahaparishad began in full swing. Chhaganbapa did not accept any position of an office bearer in the conference. His sole interest was selfless service. He took upon himself the entire burden of the work. He distributed the work among the responsible persons and made them head of different sections. In the initial stages their office was situated at Jaihind Estate at Bhuleshwar. But latter on it was shifted to a place near the main entrance to the Mahaparishad.

The office of the conference was crowded with all sorts of people from the early hours of the morning till late in the night. People would come to the office for information or for complaints and grievances. Chhaganbapa and his fellow workers would entertain each of them with great patience. Some people would openly express their indignation against some of the volunteers. Chhaganbapa would then pacify them. During these days Chhaganbapa was so engrossed in his work that he would not find time for meals or for relaxation. Seeing him working like that several men and women would be inspired to volunteer themselves to help him in his work.

One of the most important tasks of the conference was to give advice and guidance to the

youth. The travelling expenses claimed by some participants of such conferences and official meetings, are often far from legitimate. Some times false vouchers are used to pocket the funds of an organization. Chhaganbapa never put the burden of his expenses on any organization. He would spend his own money even to entertain the visitors. Besides, he would spend on telegrams, telephone calls, and travelling out of his own pocket. Chhaganbapa's example should prove to be worth emulating to the office bearers of all public organizations

The main session of the conference took place amidst considerable enthusiasm, and was presided over by Shri Nanjibhai Kalidas Mehta. A number of resolutions for the all round progress of the Lohana Community were passed. Decisions were taken to establish social and educational institutions for this purpose. The session came to a successful conclusion and Chhaganbapa set himself to the task of implementing the resolutions passed in the open session.

As a part of the post-conference programme, an organization called "Shri Lohana Sthapit Mahila Vikas Griha" was established in Rajkot. This organization offered facilities for education and vocational training to widows and destitute women. About Rs. 3 lakhs had been collected for this purpose at the conference itself. Seth Shri

Nanjibhai donated his huge building called "Swastik Bhavan", the adjacent plot of land and Rs. 2 lakhs in cash to this organization.

Similar organization for the education of young girls at Vile Parle (Shri Kanbai Lalbai Kanyashala and Balikagriha) is a living memorial of Chhaganbapa's work.

CHAPTER XVII

SERIOUS ILLNESS

There are two real tests which would separate the great man from other people, his behaviour while eating and his behaviour in illness. Self control while eating and endurance in illness are the characteristics of a great man. Chhaganbapa had both these qualities.

In 1954. Bapa's health had deteriorate due to the strain of journey to East Africa and due to the work of fund collection. The work of Gujarat Bhavan of Haridwar had not yet been completed. Therefore, Bapa went to Haridwar as soon as he returned to Bombay from Africa. Smt. Sakarben was looking after the affairs of the Bhavan all by herself. Bhagatji (Karsandas Joshi) had suddenly passed away. The incident that took place at that time was exemplary and inspiring for all. Bhagatji's death had dealt a severe blow to Sakarma. She was drowned in sorrow and was sitting near the dead body of Bhagatji. The entire staff of Dharmashala was in deep sorrow. It was at such a time that some pilgrims arrived from Delhi. Chhaganbapa consoled Sakarma "Human life is also like a Dharmashala. One day or the other everyone has to leave this Dharmashala. So, overcome your

grief and be ready to make arrangements for the pilgrims." Sakarma got up immediately and made arrangements for the lodging and boarding of the pilgrims. After a while pilgrims came to know that Mataji's husband had expired just a little while ago. They were all aggrieved and were astonished at the self-control of Mataji. It was, however, Chhaganbapa who had been responsible for bringing about this change in Mataji's outlook and provide her the real knowledge.

Due to the sudden demise of Bhagatji the accounts of Gujarat Bhavan had been pending for several days. Bapa completed the entire pending work. He took Sakarma to Rishikesh. Chhaganbapa was himself not too well. Yet through a sheer sense of responsibility he did all the work that came his way. But there are physical limitations to one's capacity to exert. He had temperature on his way back from Rishikesh. That very day he left for Delhi and from Delhi, by Frontier Mail, arrived in Bombay. He suffered quite a lot during the journey.

Smt. Maniben, Shri Hemrajbhai, Smt. Hira-ben and others had come to the station to receive him. Bapa had fever. This was the beginning of a serious illness. The fever went up when he was taken to the house of Shri Hemrajbhai. Dr. Jobanputra was called and the treatment began. The fever would not subside. It went upto 105°.

Bapa was given injections of glucose and quinine. Dr. Jobanputra left no stone unturned to see that Bapa was cured. Others were always at Bapa's service and as per the instructions of Dr. Jobanputra, nurses kept a vigil day and night.

There was a definite improvement after about ten days. Bapa was overwhelmed with gratitude for all those who looked after him during his illness. He sincerely thanked them and the Almighty. Even during these days of illness he would worry about the accounts of the funds collected in East Africa. He very strongly felt that the accounts should be audited and made public without further delay. As soon as there was some improvement in his health he took up the work of accounts, despite the instructions of the Doctor to the contrary.

Bapa needed complete rest to return to normal health. His relations were sure that he would not get complete rest in Bombay. They, therefore, decided to take him to Lonavala, a health resort near Bombay. Bapa complied with the requests of his friends and relations. There was rapid improvement in Bapa's health due to beautiful, quiet and healthy environment of Lonavala. He would go out for a walk every morning and evening. He would go to the market and buy vegetables and while at home he would play with the little son of Hemrajibhai — Kirti-bhai. All this helped Bapa considerably.

But even during these days of convalescence, Bapa would constantly worry about a few things. There is a mention of this in his diary. "My health has now improved. I take long walks. Read newspapers. Shri Hemrajbhai looks after me so much. I saw the caves of Karla. Yesterday night I walked a lot in the garden (23 rounds) and had a nice exercise. Played with Master Kirti. But the thoughts about the three things keep coming in my mind, Rajkot Conference, Hospital in Anjar and the report of the accounts of the funds collected in Africa."

According to Bapa, body is an instrument for the performance of duty (Dharma). He was against the pleasures and the comforts of the body. It was against his nature to spend a holiday at a hill station. So, in less than two weeks, he returned from Lonavala to Bombay. Doctors had advised that continuous treatment and complete rest were essential for total recovery. But Bapa did not pay any heed to the advice and continued to do the work of preparing accounts.

Bapa stayed in Bombay through the whole month of January 1955 and in February he left for Jharia with Shri Hemrajbhai to collect funds to build a Hospital at Anjar (kutch). With the help of Shri Khataubhai Shethiya he collected about Rs. 5 lakhs in Jharia — Dhanbad.

After the collection of funds, he made preparations for the construction of the Hospital building. Bapa was a man of great preservance. He would not rest till he had completed his work. He gave the contract for the construction of the Hospital to the well-known contractor of Anjar, Shri Ravjibhai Hirjibhai Patel. In the course of this work there was a lot of strain on Chhaganbapa. Consequently he developed a low blood-pressure. He would often experience giddiness. His friends and the doctor requested him to take rest. But Bapa continued to work hard. The contract had been given and now it had to be seen that the construction work proceeded according to the schedule. How could Bapa take rest? In spite of ill health he went to Calcutta to procure steel, cement and other construction material.

In the meanwhile, the blood-pressure became irregular. Dr. Mukherjee examined him and advised complete rest. Chhaganbapa had a great faith in nature cure. He observed fast and silence. That gave him a little relief. When he felt a little better, he came to Bombay and on 22nd April 1955 left for Rajkot for the second conference of the Lohana Community.

CHAPTER XVIII

KUTCH EARTHQUAKE RELIEF WORK

At 9 P.M. on the 21st July in 1956, Kutch the land of 'Mahasati' Toral was shocked by the tremors of an earthquake. This terrible earthquake wrought destruction and death in Anjar and in the neighbouring region. One hundred and nineteen died on the spot. One hundred and thirtyfive were seriously wounded. Two thousand houses were razed to the ground and six thousand others were rendered uninhabitable. As soon as the news of this earthquake reached Chhaganbapa, he rushed to Kutch to help the people affected by this terrible natural calamity.

The first meeting of the Anjar Earthquake Relief Committee was held in Anjar at the 'Mccardo' Dak Bungalow under the chairmanship of Shri Premjibhai Thakkar, the then Revenue Minister of Gujarat. Chhaganbapa was present at this meeting. In this meeting of the top level leaders, government officials and prominent citizens of Kutch, Bapa was practically a stranger. Nobody knew Bapa and yet due to his pious and self-sacrificing nature everybody felt attracted towards him. The meeting began with some preliminary discussion on the ways and means of rendering assistance to the people

affected by this terrible disaster. Chhaganbapa humbly submitted some suggestions on the basis of his experience in the field of relief operations. He said, "every affected village should be immediately given preliminary assistance. Improvised huts should be constructed for the people rendered homeless. Arrangements for their food should be made at places like 'Mahajanwadi'. (public halls) schools, etc. Later, permanent arrangements shall be made for accommodating homeless. Damaged houses requiring minor repairs should be repaired immediately and new houses must replace those which are totally destroyed."

These suggestions attracted the attention of everyone to Chhaganbapa. Everyone including Premjibhai was convinced that Chhaganbapa is an experienced person. Shri Bhavanjibhai Arjan Khimji president of local Congress party and an active social worker of Kutch, was highly impressed by Chhaganbapa. He proposed that Chhaganbapa should be appointed as the Chief of the entire relief work scheme. Chhaganbapa very humbly said, "I shall not become a member of any committee. I shall work as an ordinary worker." Reverence for Bapa grew even greater after he uttered these words of great humility.

Kutch was then a 'C' category state. It was in process of being merged into Bombay State. Relief work was undertaken by both on behalf of

the state government and the Union government. When this issue was being discussed, Chhaganbapa submitted that it would not be proper to have such a duplication and it would be better to have a single agency for relief work. This proposal of Bapa was accepted by the government.

When Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru visited Anjar, he thought of setting up a new village called "New Anjar." He asked for an estimate of expenditure. The estimate given by the Relief Committee appeared to be very low to him. He sanctioned an amount twice as much. This was a very big scheme. Five to seven villages were totally razed to the ground. Everything was required to be built anew in these villages. Agencies like Ramkrishna Mission and Times of India were ready with their funds to participate in this project. Chhaganbapa said that both responsibilities and success in this work have to be shared. All work was done on behalf of the Kutch Earthquake Relief Committee. The work was done successfully and credit for it went to the entire local leadership but the members of the Relief Committee gave the credit to Chhaganbapa.

The first thing that had to be done immediately was the work of distributing money for the repair of the damaged houses. For this purpose the government officials, Shri Kantiprasad

Antani, a well known political leader of Kutch and Chhaganbapa set out on a visiting tour. With the help of the local leaders they helped the needy in various areas. About one hundred and sixtyfive villages were covered by them. Metal sheets for improvised huts, blankets and utensils were procured from Bombay. Shri Kantiprasadbhai, who was a close associate of Chhaganbapa for many years in the Anjar earthquake relief work and many other schemes of social work in Kutch, has recorded the memories of this experience. It is reproduced here in his own words:

"There is a village called Rajasthali in Bhachau Taluka. It was seven in the morning when we reached there. The village folk insisted that we should have tea or coffee. We waited for the tea to arrive. Even after half an hour there was no sight of either tea or coffee. I asked one of the villagers as to cause of the delay. I asked him whether the delay was due to the non-availability of milk. "There is ample of milk but there is no water. The tankers have not yet arrived" came the reply. Bapa realised that there was a problem of water supply in the village. He came to know that everyone in the village has to wait for long hours without water until the tankers arrive. "I shall not have coffee, until the water arrives." declared Bapa. We immediately set out in search of the tankers. We reached Bhachau around 12

O'Clock. The tanker was idle there without a particular spare part. We proceeded Gandhidham to procure the same and gave it to the driver. We were back to Rajasthali with the water tanker by midnight. It was only then that Bapa had coffee.

"After this incident Bapa gave a serious thought to the problem of water supply in Kutch. He prepared one scheme and submitted it to Shri Blawantbhai Mehta, the then Chief Minister of Gujarat. We had to conduct a survey of nine hundred villages of Kutch in order to formulate this scheme. The scheme was a concrete proof of Bapa's drive and initiative. As a response to the submission of this scheme to the government, Shri Balwantbhai, other ministers and engineers recommended the formation of a Board. Consequently a Board was formed for the whole of Gujarat. The project did not remain confined to Kutch. It dealt with the problem of water-scarcity in Baroda and Ahmedabad, also. Bapa was of the opinion that a special Board be formed to deal with the problem of water in Kutch. Shri Balwantbhai sanctioned Bapa's scheme of Rs. 55 lakhs. The entire scheme was of Rs. 1 crore and 23 lakhs for the whole of district of which Rs. 55 lakhs were to cover 38 villages.

"Once we had been to a village called Rapar. There was one students' Boarding House in the

village. We went to the building of the Boarding House at night. About 50 to 75 students were living in that small building. Bapa saw this and said, "How can so many students live in such a small place? Is there any plot of land available nearby?" he asked. There was one local merchant with us. He said, "I shall give the land." Immediately Chhaganbapa started off to see his land. There was no electricity in Rapar in those days. The merchant was walking in the front with a lantern in his hand and we were following him. Bapa saw the plot of land and enquired about the price. The deal was settled and Bapa gave Rs. 1,000/-, on the spot as deposit to confirm it. Later Bapa got a promise from Khataubhai Shethiya that he would donate Rs. 40,000/- and a building worth rupees one lakh was constructed.

"I asked Bapa, "How is it that you can collect such a lot of money?" Bapa replied, "I do not make any special effort. The hands of the potential donors are constantly itching to donate. I pray to initiate such itch in their hands. This has become my regular occupation." Bapa was very shrewd. He had a way of identifying and evaluating people. But most important of all was that he knew his own limitations very clearly. Whenever he undertook any responsibility he would first evaluate his own capacities. This is the reason why he always succeeded.

“When we first met the time of the general elections had come very close. We had a three-member committee for relief work. The Mamlatdar, Bapa and myself. In this committee Bapa had the last word. Usually, people told us the correct facts. But sometimes there would be suspicious cases. In one of the villages we were shown the remains of a house. The house had collapsed 5 years back. I looked at Bapa. Bapa said, “You know the principle of justice. Ninety-nine criminals may escape without punishment but not a single innocent man should be punished. Let some dishonest people take advantage of a scheme but not a single honest and deserving man should go without assistance.” The man was given the relief money.

“The second example is of a woman whose hut had been washed away by the floods. She was left with a few kitchen utensils and tin boxes. She showed those things to us and began to cry. Bapa, said, “We must help these people.” He immediately prepared notes and formulated a scheme with a view to helping the people of the poor classes and the middle class. He framed a rule that those who did not have any source of income should get a piece of land. Many people benefited as a result of this rule. According to this rule, several people were given Rs. 800 as a loan and Rs. 400/- as an outright help (Rs. 1200/- in all). An amount of Rs. 15 to 20 lakhs

was sanctioned for this purpose. In the Committee I and one government official were the members and Bapa was our adviser.

"In spite of such a tight schedule Bapa never thought that work was a burden on him. He would always be full of laughter. It was pleasure to work with him. One would spontaneously feel a sense of reverence for him. I still cherish the sacred and unforgettable memory of those days of my life."

CHAPTER XIX

FIFTEEN YEARS OF PUBLIC SERVICE IN KUTCH

Shri Premjibhai Thakkar, the Revenue Minister of Gujarat and a veteran social worker, has very aptly described Bapa's attitude to life and his method of working, in following words:

"I was very closely associated with revered Chhaganbapa. I have worked with him for fifteen years. He has made a deep impression on my mind. I have learnt the following things from him.

i) Purity of character must be maintained in life, particularly in public life. Every active worker must bear in mind that any social service is effective and meaningful only when it is done spotlessly and selflessly.

ii) Any work that is undertaken must be studied carefully and in depth. Similarly, one must examine the feasibility and practicability of venture before undertaking it.

iii) Expenses incurred for personal convenience while performing a public service, must be borne by the social worker himself. Public funds should not be used for such purposes. Even the expenses incurred on postage must be borne by the person concerned.

iv) Those in public service should, if possible, refrain from taking up a position of an office-bearer. He need not even be a member of the organization. One should see to it that, while accepting the full responsibility of the work, the credit goes to some other person. Bapa had oriented himself into such constructive thinking free from any attachment.

v) Social worker must in the process of his work maintain good relations with the people of all classes and parties and with the government officials. Similarly, he must understand the difficulties of the others and must take into consideration their points of view.

vi) One should not wait passively for the opportunities of social work but should take an initiative in exploring such possibilities.

vii) One should not lose heart half way through the completion of the work, but should pursue it with consistency, concentration and concern till it is complete.

viii) Every letter must be replied to and every rupee must be accounted for.

Shri Gangjibhai Gajjar, the architect who translated Bapa's dream of New Anjar into reality, has remarked that although Omigam Bapa was not an Engineer he could guide even expert Engineers on the basis of his rich experience and organizational ability. While

giving instructions to Gangjibhai he would enter into the minutest of the details. Chhaganbapa's dedication to his work and his method of working were indeed remarkable. Shri Gangjibhai Gujar has narrated his memories as follows.

"I came into contact with Chhaganbapa in the year 1954 on the occasion of the foundation stone laying ceremony of the Anjar General Hospital. I was then a transport manager and Bapa was in need of a bus. I did not know him then. From his appearance and dress — black cap, long coat and a dhoti, he looked like a typical businessman. But as I came in closer contact with him I came to know more about him.

"The task of constructing a modern hospital building worth lakhs of rupees was not an easy one in those days. Chhaganbapa procured my services through Shri Tulsidas Sheth, the then District Collector and the job of the hospital was entrusted to me. Thus I left Bhuj and began to live in Anjar. Bapa would regularly get us the construction material from one source or the other. He would visit the construction site now and then to find out the progress of the work. Just when the construction work of the hospital was complete, there was an earthquake in Anjar and we were faced with another great task.

"The New Anjar was built at the cost of approximately Rs. 35 lakhs. I was wondering that how the work should be started. Bapa came with me and hired a house in old Anjar for the purpose of setting up an office. He made arrangements for the staff and posted me in the office. The office was shifted to New Anjar when a building for the office premises was ready there. Bapa was particular about keeping accounts of every single paisa but he was never over-economical. He insisted that everything should be beautiful, durable and the latest. People think that it was I who built New Anjar, but I tell every one that the New Anjar was built mainly because of Bapa's consistent guidance. We faced several obstacles and unforeseen difficulties but Bapa enabled us to overcome them.

"Bapa realised during his stay in Kutch that the region was educationally backward. He thought that as the people were beginning to feel the need for education, every village with a population of more than five hundred should have its own school and that every school should have its own school-building. He immediately prepared a scheme for the construction of school buildings in 27 villages of Anjar Block. He collected funds from the people and from the government for this purpose. The buildings which were built, are strong beautiful

and equipped with all facilities. The entire scheme was planned and implemented by Bapa. He entrusted the job to four contractors. Bapa would visit the construction sites every fortnight and would personally study the progress. He would carefully look into every minute detail of the work. He would use taxi for conveyance and would spend out of his own pocket. He must have spent at least Rs. 4000/- on taxi fare alone during this period.

"For a long time Bapa had been thinking of renovating the Koteswar Mahadev Temple which was situated on the bank of Narain Lake. It was Bapa's idea to do this elaborately on the lines of Somnath Temple, with a regular road upto Narain Lake, water supply facilities, petrol pump, stairs leading to the temple, holiday camp and an up-to-date auditorium to celebrate festivals.

"Chhaganbapa, as the disciple of Revered Thakkarbapa would think constantly about the ways and means of removing ignorance and the poverty of the people of Kutch. Revered Shri Thakkarbapa had suggested that special attention should be paid to the refugees of Gandhidham and Adipur and particularly to the Harijans. Therefore, Chhaganbapa took this work very seriously and exerted himself considerably. He obtained a loan of Rs. 12 lakhs from the government, purchased land at a very low

price and constructed 450 houses. Each house had a terrace, a living room and kitchen, a bathroom, latrine and a gallery and had been constructed at a cost of mere Rs. 2400/- each.

“The work done by and through Bapa were indeed great; but his life was even greater. So pure and pious was his life that even impious would be inspired to lead a life of piety in his company. There is a deep impression of Bapa’s personality on my life.”

Shri Kundanbhai Dholkia, speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Gujarat has recorded some of his sweet memories of Bapa, as follows:

“In the year 1959 there was an abnormally heavy rainfall in the Kutch region (60 inches instead of the normal 12 inches). This led to a flood. We then set out to distribute Rs. 60,000/- among the flood-affected people. We finished this work within three days. We would go out in the morning and would return only in the evening. At the end of the day we would be very tired but Bapa would insist that the accounts of day to day transactinos should be written on the same day. Bapa had a remarkable accounting skill and he was a stickler for regularity of accounts. So wellknown was Bapa’s honesty and ability that the rich would come on their own to Bapa to donate. These days, it is very difficult to collect Rs. 10,000/- but in Bapa’s presence even the hardest of the people would become soft as

flowers. Bapa would talk to a minister and to an ordinary clerk with equal ease and simplicity. He did not think it was below his dignity to bow down before the lowest of the low.

"He would say, "I am willing to meet anyone in order to accomplish my work. Even if he happens to be a petty official I do not mind addressing him as "Sahib."

Bapa's nature was very sweet. He would never get exhausted due to hard work. We would often tell him "Bapa, you will get exhausted." Then he would laugh and say, "How can I get exhausted when my business is flourishing." We would then ask him, "What business?" "This business of running up and down. "He would retort laughingly"

Following is the brief account of the work of public service done by Bapa in the Kutch region.

1) Anjar Hospital

The work of Shrimati Gangabai Premji Harji Hospital was taken up in 1954. The construction of this well-equipped hospital involved the expenditure of Rs. 5 lakhs. The foundation stone was laid by the Central Health Minister, Srimati Amrit Kaur and the inauguration was done by Shrimati Maniben Khataubhai Shetia.

2) Help to the victims of Anjar Earthquake

Anjar was rocked by the tremors of an earthquake at 9.00 p.m. on the 21st of July 1956. 119 lives were lost and 135 were seriously wounded. 2000 houses were razed to the ground and about 6000 houses were damaged. The total loss of property was to the tune of Rs. 1 crore. Bapa went to the rescue of the people who had become the victims of this terrible disaster. He had rich experience of this kind of work in Assam, Orissa, Bihar. "New Anjar" was constructed at the cost of Rs. 35 lakhs. The beauty of "New Anjar" was enhanced as a result of its beautiful main Gate, Tower, Town Hall, Statue of Mahatma Gandhi, Thakkarbapa Students Hostel, Primary School etc. Ramkrishna Nagar, Sharda Nagar and Vivekanand Nagar were constructed on behalf of Shri Ramkrishna Mission. Five new villages were set up with the help of Times of India Aid Fund. Bapa gave his valuable guidance and helped for each one of these projects.

3) Water Supply Scheme

Hundreds of villages in the Kutch region faced the problem of water shortage. Women had to get up in the early hours of dawn and walk long distance to bring water. Bapa saw this with his own eyes and agrieved for those women. He took personal interest in the problem. In 1963 he

took up the water supply scheme. He visited about 950 villages along with Shri Premjibhai Thakkar, Shri Kantiprasad Antani and Shri Gangjibhai Gajjar, studied the problem in detail and prepared the scheme. He met the Chief Minister of Gajarat, Shri Balwantbhai, at his Ahmedabad residence. The Chief Minister immediately sanctioned Rs. 55 lakhs. Chhaganbapa exclaimed, "you have given me a joy of fulfilment at the fag end of my life."

Thereafter the Kutch district Panchayat took up an ambitious programme of water supply for three hundred and fiftyfour villages, involving an expenditure of Rs. 2,10,83,000 to which the Gujarat Government gave its acceptance in principle. Chhaganbapa had submitted a scheme of tubewells for making use of the underground water resources, to the Government of India and to the Gujarat Government. The officials and technicians of the Government of India came to Kutch with their equipment and machinery and they drilled about 181 tube wells immediately. At present most of these wells are being used for irrigating agricultural land with the help of electrically operated pumps.

4) Primary School Buildings

In the course of his earthquake Relief work in the Anjar Taluka, Bapa noticed that the schools in this area did not have their own build-

ings. He got buildings constructed for the primary schools of 27 villages. He obtained Rs. 1,57,214 from district authorities and Rs. 62,960/- as people's contribution. The schools were inaugurated on the birth-day anniversary of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, by the the President of Congress, Smt. Indira Gandhi. Chhaganbapa put in a lot of effort to make this programme a success. Panditji was presented with a silver box weighing 150 Tolas, a work of Kutch Craftsmanship. The names of 27 villages were beautifully carved on that silver box.

Besides, Rs. 3 lakhs were collected from friends for the purpose of school buildings in the towns of Anjar, Ganeshnagar, etc. An incident illustrative of how Chhaganbapa was able to mobilise such funds of huge amounts, is given below.

For the construction of schools in the backward areas of Rapar and Bhachau Taluka it was very difficult to obtain people's contribution. So Bapa tried in Bombay. Money was collected but the collection was falling short of the expected amount. Shri Shivajibhai Dharamsi Shethia had then fallen ill. Chhaganbapa went to meet him along—with Premjibhai Thakkar. Shivajibhai casually asked, "why is Bapa looking so depressed." Bapa said, "the schools of Rapar and Bhachau Taluka do not have their own buildings.

I have taken upon myself the responsibility of collecting people's contribution for this purpose. That is what I am worried about." Shivajibhai said immediately, "This is not your burden. It is ours. Stop worrying and relax." Bapa got an amount of Rs. 15,000/-. This is how Chhaganbapa collected funds from people. Similarly he collected funds from Shri Karamsi Somaiya Trust as people's contribution for the schools of Bhuj and Abdasa Talukas.

5) Anjar Girls High School

In the whole of Kutch region there was no separate high school for girls except in Mandvi. Bapa felt sorry about the fact that there was no high school for girls in Anjar Taluka. He obtained a generous donation of Rs. 1,31,000/- from his friend Shri Khataubhai Shethiya and the imposing building of "Shrimati Kankubai Khataumavji Shethiya Girls High School" was set up.

6) Girls Hostel at Bhuj

There was an urgent need for a separate hostel for girls in the Lalan College of Bhuj. Bapa realised this. He got an unexpected opportunity to get a donation for the hostel building. Bapa was not well and was being treated at the Harkisandas Hospital of Bombay. Dr. Shantilal Mehta conducted the operation. The doctor

refused to accept the operation fee, but Bapa insisted on paying it and said "some day I shall also charge my fees for the purpose of some public work."

Dr. Mehta was in charge of a Public Trust. This trust had set aside Rs. 40,000/- for donation to public work. Dr. Mehta expressed his willingness to give this amount to Bapa. Bapa obtained the necessary sanction from the public trust as per the rules and regulations of the trust. The amount was used for the hostel building for the girls of Lalan College of Bhuj. Bapa obtained an equal amount of money from the government. The hostel was named "Shri Waghji Laxmidas Trust Girls' Hostel."

7) Bhuj Lohana Boarding

Lohana Boarding was situated in a very small building in a very crowded part of the city of Bhuj. Bapa was not happy about it. He obtained Rs. 50,000/- from Shri Virjibhai Devsi of Bombay, for the purpose of the Boarding. Besides he collected a total fund of Rs. 1,64,000/- at the rate of Rs. 3000/- per room for 28 rooms. The new building of Lohana Boarding is now situated on a spacious ground and there is a beautiful garden around the building. Bapa has himself borne the expenditure of one of the rooms in this building.

8) Bhuj Hospital — Rest House

The general hospital of Bhuj is quite far from the city. Patients from distant villages of Kutch come to this hospital. There was no facility, whatsoever, for the relative of the patients to stay in Bhuj. Chhaganbapa took up this problem and obtained the construction expenditure of 19 rooms at the rate of Rs. 5000/- per room, with the help of Kutch Vikas Mandal of Bombay. He then entrusted the management of this institution to the Health Department of Bhuj District. This rest house has proved to be of great help to the rural folk.

9) Anjar Public Bath and Washing Facility

While in Anjar Bapa's attention was drawn towards a comparatively minor but an urgent problem. There was no public place in the city where women could bathe and wash clothes. The women were forced to go to distant places, where there was no privacy and women would find it inconvenient and embarrassing. Chhaganbapa got separate places built for men and women for the purpose of bathing and washing clothes. For this purpose he collected donations from friends. The bath rooms are fitted with shower-taps. These facilities are equally available

to people of all castes and communities.

10) Sardar Vallabhabhai Patel School

A lot of Gujarati people live in Gandhidham and Kandla. There was an urgent need for a Gujarati Medium High School in that area. 'Gujarat Education Society' was established at Gandhidham, with the inspiration from Chhaganbapa. Smt. Chandraben Manubhai Rawal was appointed as the head of the society. She got in touch with Shri Bhawanji Arjan Khimji, the head of Kutch Vikas Mandal and Shri Babubhai Chinoy. An amount of Rs. 75,000/- was obtained from Sardar Vallabhabhai Patel Memorial Trust, with the help of Chhaganbapa. And additional amount of Rs. 75,000/- was also obtained from Shri Laxmi Narain Trust managed by Messrs K. Worah & Co. A huge and beautiful building was constructed at the approximate cost of Rs. 3 lakhs for the purpose of a high school. The foundation stone of this building was laid by Shri Babubhai Chinoy. Chhaganbapa was present at this function. The inauguration of the building was done by Shri Shriman Narain, the Governor of Gujarat on 14th April 1969. Bapa had passed away in the meanwhile. His absence was very much felt by everyone present. Several speakers at this function spoke at length about the great contribution made by Chhaganbapa towards the building of this school. Bapa served the people

of Kutch selflessly and with a sense of dedication for 15 years. The people of Kutch express their deep sense of respect and gratitude towards this great man even to-day.

CHAPTER XX

GUIDANCE TO 'LIJJAT' INSTITUTION

Chhaganbapa gave his friends and associates as much love and affection as he gave to his own sons. Bapa would guide them in several matters. He also looked after and nurtured various institutions and constantly encouraged them to grow.

Like many other institutions, 'Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad' had benefit of the guidance of Chhaganbapa from its very inception. In the absence of Chhaganbapa's association, institution would not have enjoyed the benefit of his constant valuable guidance and one wonders whether the institution would have been able to achieve the amount of success which it has been able to. 'Lohana Nivas,' the cluster of buildings where 'Lijjat' started, is like a separate town. These buildings have been built in the crowded area of Girgaum by late Shri Rugnath Lalji Charitable Trust. Families of Lohana community are given rooms in these buildings at a low rent. Ever since 1952 when tenants of 'Lohana Nivas' had their first opportunity to meet Chhaganbapa, they had sense of love and attachment for him. They would seek his advice on all kinds of problems. Bapa would patiently answer their ques-

tions and they would feel satisfied with his answers.

Once there started a heated controversy between the main Organiser and the other workers of one house-hold — industrial institution of Bombay, over a certain issue. Both the parties were extremely stubborn and took-up "what I say is correct" position. The controversy went on for several days. Finally the issue was taken to Chhaganbapa. Chhaganbapa called both the parties. Both the parties argued their respective cases vehemently. After hearing the arguments he said quietly. Both of you are right but as a result of your controversies your institution is running in loss'. Bapa proved correct and after some days this institution had to be closed down. It was Chhaganbapa's considered view that public institutions are meant for public work. They are not meant for futile controversies and conflicts of "I am right, you are wrong" nature. Whenever such controversies arise, the work grinds to a halt and the time comes to shut down the institution.

Chhaganbapa often used to tell the social workers certain sentences such as "Make a business out of it." "Always go in a big way" etc. "Make a business out of it" was actually Late Shri Thakkarbappa's sentence. Thakkarbappa would often use it in his conversation with

Chhaganbapa. The implication of this sentence is that one should emulate a businessman in one's conduct. A businessman is primarily interested in satisfying his customer's needs because he knows that therein lies his interest. Social workers too must consider their work as their profession and they must endeavour to render maximum satisfaction to their "Customers."

The other favourite sentence of Chhaganbapa was "Always go in a big way." Bapa would never like any social worker to take up any work meekly on a restricted basis or on small scale. He believed that one should take decisions in public work quickly and courageously and accomplish it with a bang. Perhaps he thought that an honest social worker has nothing to be afraid of and what benefit will the small job render to the community? On the contrary, he felt that big projects are more likely to be successful because they receive wider publicity and naturally attract more talented people.

The 'Lijjat' institution was established on an experimental basis in the year 1959. At that time Bapa advised the organisers "Not to think like pavement hawkers." He taught them to think like big businessmen and act accordingly. When 'Lijjat' began, nobody had imagined that the enterprise would be so successful. When Chhaganbapa came to know the idea of starting such an enterprise, he liked it very much. He

went to the trustees of Lohana Niwas and explained to them the whole scheme. The trustees gave one room of Lohana Niwas for this purpose. At that time Bāpa told the truth to one of the trustees jokingly "one room will not be sufficient for this organization, another 26 rooms will be required, so be ready for that".

Whenever Chhaganbapa undertook any task, he saw to it that it benefitted everyone. He did not like the idea of benefitting one at the expense of the other. When the 'Lijjat' institution started in Lohana Niwas, many tenants were very irregular in the payment of their rent. When a room in Lohana Niwas was allotted to 'Lijjat' a condition was laid down that all members of 'Lijjat' living in Lohana Niwas must pay the rent for their respective rooms regularly.

When for the first time Chhaganbapa came to see the working of 'Lijjat' institution in Lohana Niwas, two types of 'Papads' used to be made, (1) First Quality and (2) Hotel Quality. Bapa did not like it. But he did not say anything in the presence of everybody. However, while leaving, he took one of the organisers aside and said to him "Throw away your entire stock of second quality papads. I am willing to bear the cost." The organizer was taken a back. He churned out an argument that "second quality papads are cheaper and have a larger sale. This

would help to accommodate more women." Chhaganbapa was angry. He raised his voice and said, "I do not want to listen to any arguments when it comes to the question of "quality". It does not matter if less women get work but inferior quality goods must never be made."

Bapa was indeed right in his insistence on quality. Today 'Lijjat' papad has acquired a reputation precisely because of its uniform and consistent high quality. It has helped it a lot from the business point of view, 'Lijjat' never had to repent for having stopped the production of second quality 'Papads.'

Chhaganbapa's guidance to Lijjat proved to be extremely valuable. In the initial period, as the sales began to increase the sisters and well-wishers of Lijjat began to develop a kind of 'pride'. "Look how our papads are selling!" they began to say boastfully. When Bapa noticed this he said, "You manufacture this much papads, but do not let this success go into your heads. You are so many people working collectively and there are many prominent people there to help you. That is why you have succeeded. But there are many other people doing their private business, who have achieved greater success. They pay sales tax and income tax and are yet able to earn good profits. Have you ever noticed, how they keep their customers happy and work

tidily? Have you ever seen how they conduct their business? There are so many of you and if you manage to sell this much papads, there is nothing great about it."

When the Organization was continuously progressing and was able to afford some reasonable extra expenses, some people approached Bapa with a complaint that money is being spent carelessly. Bapa merely asked, "is the organization still running? He then said, "Tell me if the accouts are not properly maintained or, if sister's self-respect was not preserved. It is not good to complain about minor things."

The member sisters of 'Lijjat' had firmly resolved right from the beginning that no matter if they get less money, they would not approach anyone for donation or help to run the organization. The organization made good money from the sale of papads. So there was never a need for donation or help. But if one were to run an educational institution or a hospital, it would be altogether a different matter. When Chhaganbapa came to know of this resolve he was very happy but just in order to test their firmness he asked the organisers "How can your organisation run smoothly without donations and help?" He went on to explain in details how they would face difficulties if they did not accept donations or help, and said, if you do not want to make any public pronouncement and ready to accept some

private financial assistance. I shall arrange it from my friends."

He then made an elaborate analysis of the circumstances which create the need for donations. He said, "Look around yourself. All organisations which run household industries are established on the basis of donations. They function only on the basis of donations. Do you think that the managers of these organisations are not competent enough? Are they dishonest? Do they swallow money? No. Not at all. The managers of public organizations are usually honest. But they do not have enough time. They have other things to do. They cannot attend to the day-to-day work of the organization. This leads to delays, deterioration of the quality of goods and decline in the sales. Such organizations usually incur losses and are forced to accept donations. If you do not want your organization to incur losses and be forced to accept donations, you must run it like a business enterprise. You shall have to be the vigilant custodian of the property of your organisation like a black cobra.

In this connection there is one more incident which is worth relating. While Bapa was in Haridwar he was consulted on some important question regarding 'Lijjat'. He said in very clear terms "everything from black pepper to the papad is pilfered from your institution. If you were the owners of this business, you would not

indulge in pilferage." As a result of this pointed comment of Chhaganbapa, a minute inspection was carried out and accounts were properly checked. It was found out that Bapa's criticism was hundred percent correct. This led to a definite improvement in the functioning of the institution and immediately the profits went up. Consequently, the member sisters began to receive two Annas more for rolling (Papads).

When Bapa came to know that 'Lijjat' does not accept donations, he made it to donate Rs. 1,000/- to the other organization, namely Matushri Kanbai Lalbai Balika Griha, a well known educational institution of Vile Parle. This was the first major donation by the 'Lijjat' institution.

Lijjat was established in 1959. But it did not have a written constitution, nor was it a registered organization. It was progressing only on the basis of mutual trust, co-operation and understanding. The organisers felt that a recognition from the Khadi and Village Industries Commission would add to the prestige of the institution. It would, they thought accelerate the pace of growth besides rendering some sales tax and income-tax concessions. Late Dhebarbhai was then the Chairman of Khadi and Village Industries Commission. The organisers presented their proposals to Chhaganbapa. Bapa wrote a small note to Dhebarbhai, which said that the orga-

nization is functioning satisfactorily and that he ought to help it, if possible.

When Dhebarbhai received Bapa's note, he immediately responded. He helped the organization to frame its constitution and to get it registered under the Societies Registration Act. Dhebarbhai visited the organization to see its functioning before it could be given recognition by Khadi and Village Industries Commission. Chhaganbapa, with a purpose, remained absent on the occasion. When Dhebarbhai was shown the books of accounts he said. "I have with me note of Chhaganbapa. So I shall not check the books of account. I shall see everything else." Dhebarbhai meant that the accounts of organization with which Chhaganbapa is associated must necessarily be flawless and need not, therefore, be inspected.

Chhaganbapa firmly believed that the accounts of public organizations must be regularly and properly maintained. Whenever any organization approached Chhaganbapa for help or for guidance, he asked one pointed question "Are the accounts of your organization up-to-date?" He would insist on getting the accounts completed before proceeding further.

Chhaganbapa always used to advise Lijjat people not to keep with them a single paisa belonging to institution without making entries

in proper book of accounts. He believed that it is not sufficient for anybody to be honest at heart, his accounts must also be flawless. If you happen to have with you the money belonging to the organization and if you suddenly pass away or if anything unexpected happens to you, the organization will have to lose that money, but not if the money is properly accounted for. If you have in your pocket the money belonging to the organization and if this is not entered into the account books, it means that you have mis-used the money. This is not proper in social work.

Right from the beginning of 'Lijjat', Bapa had given clear instructions to everyone. "Keep your accounts clean." Each centre of the 'Lijjat' prepares its daily accounts at the end of each day and the monthly Balance sheet is prepared on the last day of the month. A copy of this balance sheet is sent not only to all the members of the organization, but also to all those who, in one way or another, are associated with the organization.

Chhaganbapa was capable of thinking of the minutest detail of every problem. He had told the people of the organization "concentrate exclusively on the papad business. Do not take part in dance, drama or entertainment programmes." He had issued a strict instruction that the members of the organizations should not organise entertainment programmes or picnics.

Chhaganbapa had often told 'Lijjat' that you shall never get young, clever and honest staff members to work for the institution. He was well aware of the amount of negligence in carrying out public work by everybody on the basis of the rule "Everybody's business is nobody's business". He used to say "you shall have to pay the double salary to the staff and even then you shall get only half of the normal work from your staff." He would say all these things because he had great love for the "Lijjat" institution. He would advise its organizers to be careful and not to hurt the feeling of self-respect of the member sisters. He asked the organizers to treat a fall in the number of members in the organisation as an indication of defective management, and to set out to rectify it, immediately.

CHAPTER XXI

FAREWELL

Someone has compared human life with a spider. The spider spins the fibre out of its own saliva and climbs up with its help to its original position. In the same manner, the human soul enters the world owing to the attachment of 'Maya' and achieves his original position by slowly giving up the worldly attachments.

It was Chhaganbapa's nature to pursue the task undertaken to its completion, regardless of physical discomfort. He exerted himself beyond his capacity to fulfil the responsibilities he had taken upon himself. Due to such excessive exertion he had a heart attack on 1.9.1967 while in Calcutta. He had severe chest-pain as he was coming out of the bath-room. His younger son Shri Mulchandbhai immediately telephoned Dr. Patel. The doctor came and examined Bapa. Mulchandbhai brought an oxygen cylinder as per the doctor's instructions. It was a serious illness. Bapa, thinking that he might not survive this illness, called his two sons and said "Rishi's (Bapa's domestic servant) daughter is getting married in the month of Falguna. Pay him Rs. 300/- and do not deduct it from his salary." Having said this Bapa relaxed.

Bapa had nothing else to say to the members of his family. This was like the last wish of Socrates who wanted to return the cock that he had borrowed from a neighbour.

Bapa's illness was quite serious. He was under the treatment of an eminent doctor of Calcutta, Dr. Chandrakant Thakkar. Dr. Chandrakantbhai had great love and respect for Bapa. He diagnosed Bapa and started a treatment for diabetes. Bapa was looked after by the nurses day and night. Bapa needed rest. The doctor, therefore advised against interviews and visitors. But Bapa insisted that all those who came to enquire about his health should be permitted to meet him.

During his illness, Bapa had to bear both physical and mental pain. But when he had difficulty in chanting the name of Rama, he found it unbearable. He would constantly worry about the tasks which he had undertaken in the name of God, and which had yet to be completed. He had decided to go to Bombay to collect funds for Kanbai Lalbai Balika Griha. His railway ticket had to be cancelled due to this sudden illness. He did not like it. As a result of careful treatment and rest he recovered a little. But on 26.9.1967 at 1.30 A.M. he had another heart attack. The doctor was called at 2-15 A.M. The treatment was intensified. All interviews and programmes were cancelled.

Despite such grave illness, Bapa would worry about Balikaashram because Bapa had put in a lot of effort to build up this institution. The girls had to attend school in a very old building under difficult circumstances. Due to Bapa's efforts girls in much larger number could attend their school in a big building on a spacious ground at Vile Parle. Bapa's dream came true. He was very happy. In view of this, Doctor permitted him to remain present at a function organised by this institution on 10.10.1967.

At this function of Shri Kanbai Lalbai Balikagriha, more than two thousand people were present. The function went off well. A fund of Rs. 4 lakhs was collected. Chhaganbapa's efforts were fruitful. Chhaganbapa came back to Calcutta as he had promised earlier to the doctor and to the members of his family. On his journey from Bombay to Calcutta, Bapa's friends and admirers came to meet him at every station. With their good wishes he returned to Calcutta safe and sound.

As the last moment draw closer the worry about the unfinished tasks began to increase. All the members of the family had a keen desire that Jayashri, daughter of Shri Mulchandbhai and Vasantbhai, the son of Shri Ratilalbhai should get engaged. Bapa looked into the matter. But while he got involved in such domestic problems he had Kutch all the time on his mind.

The water supply programme of Kutch had not yet been completed. So he left Bombay for Kutch. He met the officials in connection with the project. He inspected the on-going construction work of a school building of Gujarat Education Society at Gandhidham. He went to Anjar with Smt. Maniben Khatau Shethia. Maniben showed him the 'Boarding' at 'Rapar'. He visited the temple of Koteswar Mahadev on the banks of Narayan Lake, and chalked out a scheme of Rs. 15 lakhs for the renovation of the temple. He discussed the scheme with the government official. He secured a promise from Jashawantbhai Vora for a donation of Rs. 25,000/-.

After returning to Calcutta from Kutch, he started correspondence with the Gujarat Government for the renovation of Narayan Lake. While he was doing all this, he was also constantly thinking about the plan to construct 16 additional rooms in the Gujarat Bhavan at Haridwar. In those days he had made it a point to observe silence till five in the evening, which gave him a lot of peace of mind so that he could meditate.

The wedding of Miss Jayashri and Mr. Vasantkumar was fixed on 24.11.1968. As soon as the Mahurat was fixed the preparation for the wedding began. Invitations were sent to all the friends. Discussions regarding the preparation for wedding would start every evening after five. He

would, however get up very early in the morning, and think about the servants. There is a note in his diary on 17.10.1968, "servants go to bed at 11.30 P.M. They also need rest. Even if I get up early in the morning I do not come out of my room. So the servants are not put to difficulties. I try not to bother them." "It is a pleasure to read the sixth part of Mahabharata—Shanti Parva."

Wedding is a rare occasion in the family. It is a source of great joy for the family. Chhaganbapa was attached to the family. He had a wide friend circle. His friends had immense love and affection for him. This was evident at the wedding ceremony. They came for the wedding from distant place. Friends and acquaintances came to Calcutta in large number from Bombay, Rajkot, Jamnagar, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Rajnandgaon, Raipur and from many other places. Revered Ranchoddasji Maharaj sent his blessings from Bombay. Bhagawan Shri Vallabh Pande came personally from Haridwar to give his blessings. A reception was organised on 23rd November 1968 at Mahajanwadi in Calcutta, and on 24th November another reception ceremony was organised at Bhavanipur Gujarati College to bless the new couple. The entire Gujarati community of Calcutta and friends of the family were present at this function in large number. Everyone present felt as if this was his own

function. It appeared as if it was a single large family celebrating on that day. The wedding looked like a big conference. The atmosphere was unprecedented and pleasant.

When the happiness and joy of the daughter's wedding reach their peak, one witnesses a moving sad scene of separation of a daughter from her parents. The great poet Kalidas has described this very beautifully in his 'Shakuntala.' Such occasions arise in every family. The tears of a departing daughter suddenly lead a poignant and sad touch to the otherwise cheerful atmosphere. Chhaganbapa's life was that of an ascetic. He was getting detached from material life and yet he was a kind man full of paternal love and affection. The pangs of separation, which even a Rishi like Kanwa could not bear, were indeed unbearable to the soft hearted man that Chhaganbapa was. Bapa had never cried in his life, but he did at the point of departure. All those who witnessed this heart-rending sight could not control their tears.

The guests began to leave from the next day onwards. Bapa would make it a point to see each one of them off at the railway station or at the airport. The guests would request "You are not well. Don't take the trouble." Friends from Calcutta would say, "we shall see them off. You take rest." Finally Bapa entrusted the work to Ratilal-

bhai and Mulchandbhai and stayed at home. Due to the excessive exertion during the wedding he developed a pain in the legs.

The guests and the relatives departed and the house which used to be full of din and noise, suddenly became quiet. The absence of his daughter made the house even more depressing for Bapa. His health began to gradually deteriorating. Mulchandbhai asked, "shall we fetch the doctor." Chhaganbapa replied in the negative, but Mulchandbhai could not sit quietly. He phoned the doctor. Bapa did not like this. He got out of the house, sat near the Victoria Memorial and began to chant the name of god. When the doctor arrived, Mulchandbhai took him to the Memorial. Bapa was deeply engrossed in chanting "Hare Ram." The doctor requested him to come home. But as Bapa was engrossed in 'Bhajan' he did not go home. Doctor said to Mulchandbhai, "You don't worry. I shall take care of him. I shall examine him at his convenience." The next day Dr. Thakkar came again. He examined Bapa and started the treatment. Those days Shri Bachubhai Thakkar, who lived next door, used to visit Bapa now and then. Bachubhai was worried because he had a daughter to be married. Bapa took a lot of trouble and finally got her married to the son of his friend Shri Chaturbhujbhai. Thus, in spite

of his illness Bapa was always ready to help his friends and relatives.

Bapa's health was deteriorating day by day. Dr. Chandrakantbhai Thakkar was treating him with great care. But in spite of treatment there appeared to be no improvement in Bapa's health. He had lost appetite. He would drink very little water. So he had urine trouble. The success of a doctor and of his treatment depend upon the attitude of the patient. When the patient has a strong desire to get well, the illness diminishes. But Chhaganbapa had almost totally given up the attachment to the physical existence. He had no desire to go on living. Once he said to the doctor, "Doctor this is my last illness. Why do you try so much to cure me?" Bapa meant to say that there is no point in preserving the body, which is a gift of nature by unnatural means. Since Bapa had lost appetite, the doctor would try to give him liquid food with the help of a tube. Chhaganbapa would not like it. On 11th December 1968, Bapa suddenly began to vomit. The doctor was worried. The next day he contacted Dr. K.K. Ghosh. the wellknown surgeon of Bengal. Dr. Ghosh was consulted on the need for an operation. Another wellknown Dr. A.K. Basu was also called. The three doctors thought over the problem and decided against surgery. But they decided that Bapa should be moved to the Nursing Home. Bapa thought that

it was his last illness and that all treatment should be stopped. He would be engrossed in meditation.

Finally, Bapa yielded to the persuasion of Shri Chhotalal bhai Thakkar and Dr. Chandrakant bhai and permitted himself to be moved to the Nursing Home. On Friday the 13th, he was taken to the hospital. Bapa had diabetes and his urine had to be regularly examined. His kidneys were not functioning properly. He was being given glucose. But poison was spreading all over his body. The treatment was of no avail. At 8.45 P.M. on Saturday, 14th December 1968' Bapa, who saved the lives of several people, breathed his last. Bapa's face, even at this last moment, was lit up by a profound quietude.

The room in the hospital was overflowing with grief. Bapa had been seriously ill but none had expected that he would suddenly pass away like that. Everyone had hoped that he would survive through his illness.

The sad news of Bapa's unexpected demise spread all over Calcutta with the speed of lightning. It reached his relations living in distant places. Everyone was shocked. Everyone thought as if he had lost someone who was one of his family members.

The next day the Gujarati Community of Calcutta and other friends of Bapa were present

at the funeral procession in large numbers. This was indeed a very sad occasion. Condolence meetings were held in Calcutta and in other places. Editorials were written on this great soul in news papers like 'Bombay Samachar' and 'Navroz'. Revered Ranachhoddasji Maharaj and other friends sent messages of consolation. Revered Bapa was a 'Bapa' not only of his family but of several families. It is said that death immortalises a mortal man. This was indeed true in Bapa's case. Bapa achieved fulfilment through life and through death.

CHAPTER XXII

THE GOAL & SOME PRINCIPLES OF BAPA'S LIFE

The goal of Late Chhaganbapa's life was self-revelation. He had practised a hard Kashthamauna penance in the Himalayas in order to discover the ultimate truth. But he abandoned that method and followed the path shown by Lord Krishna in Bhagwatgita — the path of Karma Yog. His whole life was based on certain philosophy. He had accepted certain principles in his life.

As an epilogue to this book we present some of the principles of Bapa's life. We hope that they prove to be guidance to the readers.

- 1) Good character is a greatest assets of the life.
- 2) One should remember God every morning. One should, if possible read Geeta for half an hour every day. One should study the religious books and think and meditate over them.
- 3) One should never shirk from work, one should not desire to become an idler and should read good books whenever there is no work.
- 4) One should try to uplift every member of one's family by educating him.

5) One should spend according to one's capacity. Account of income and expenditure should be maintained every month, and some thinking should be done over the accounts.

6) As the income increases, one should have an insurance policy. Besides, one should not forget to save.

7) Members of the family (men and women) should be trained to maintain accounts.

8) One along with the members of the family should learn the language of the region where one lives. Working knowledge of English should be treated as essential. This will facilitate a greater understanding of and smoother relationship with other people in society.

9) One should encourage the members of one's family to take interest in sewing, embroidering etc.

10) One should not economise on eating, nor should one let members of one's family do it. One should generously invite friends and relatives and get unadulterated happiness. One should not keep the company of selfish people.

11) One should not try to cheat anyone, nor should one try to be happy at somebody else's expenses. At the same time, one should be careful that he is not cheated by others.

12) One should beware of selfish people. One should be ever vigilant and see to it that one is not led astray by selfish people.

13) If one tells a lie inadvertently one should repent for it and ask for forgiveness from God.

14) One should keep his heart open in relations with other families which come into one's contact and help them.

15) One should devote to the service of society according to one's capacity.

16) One should maintain spotless character. One should not slander others, and should have noble thoughts.

17) One must make others think that one always tells the truth. To do this one must make one's life full of truth and honesty. One should behave in such a manner as to create a feeling of reverence to one in others.

18) There is no doubt that man can change himself and become what he wants to become. However, he must do things worthy of man's heritage. If he wishes to attain God he must entertain no other dreams. If he wants to succeed in the profession he must constantly think of the profession alone. If he wishes to attain knowledge he must endeavour to attain it day and night. In short, whichever the role that he might want to

play in the world, he must fully immerse himself into it. Nothing is impossible.

19) However learned one may be, one should not look down upon others. One should have respect for others.

20) One should not economise in uttering greeting and rendering respect to others. If some body has done small work for us, we must treat that he has done a big favour to us and should never forget it.

21) One's language should be sweet. There should not be any bitterness in one's relationship with others.

22) One should feel happy at the prosperity of other people. One should not be envious.

23) Knowledge increases in the company of knowledgeable persons and business expands in the company of businessmen. The company of learned people and businessmen always prove beneficial.

24) Children should be taken out for walk on Sundays. They should be encouraged to make observations of various things. They should be given nutritious food, especially milk and green vegetables. Diseases are usually due to lack of nutritious diet. Every member of the family should be particular about nutritious diet and physical exercise.

25) We did not understand the importance of national service because our mentality was that of a slave. But a time will come when everyone will have to do something for the country. One should look after the security of one's family and should instil confidence in every member of the family. One should give them good books to read.

26) One should ask oneself everyday as to whether one is trying hard enough to improve oneself.

27) If there has to be unity in the family. each member of the family must learn to be tolerant.

28) One must brood over the days work before going to bed every night. One must repent for the mistakes one might have committed and must be careful not to let the same mistakes happen again.

29) One must have love for one's servants. During their illness one must forget that they are one's servants. They must be looked after as if they were the members of one's family. They be given the necessary treatment. One should not indulge in fishy business. One's thoughts should be noble. One should not hurt the feelings of others.

30) One should not indulge in intrigues. One should always keep benevolent thought and should not hurt anybody's feelings.

31) Women should be treated with respect. Our conduct with them must be noble and pure.

32) Many sins are committed in adverse circumstances. Religion disappears. Knowledge does not help. Wise man is one who in such circumstances leaves everything else and prays God Ramchandra. One should not forget God.

33) Everyone loved everyone else in the kingdom of Rama. People lived according to the moral principles laid down in the Vedas and had attachment to religion. They did not sin even in their dreams. They were devoid of pride. They were deeply religious and righteous. All men and women were virtuous and clever, full of knowledge and gratitude. There wasn't an ounce of wickedness and dishonesty in them. All men and women were generous. Men were monogamous. Everyone read the religious books like the Puranas. at home.

34) Talking about good people and evil people a poet has said, "An axe chops the sandle-wood because its nature is to cut. The sandle-wood tree, however, lends fragrance to the axe by giving it a sandle-wood handle." One's conduct should be like that of a sandle-wood tree.

35) There is no other religion than living for others. Man commits sins due to temptation and selfishness. One must save oneself from temptation and selfishness.

APPENDIX I

Late Revered Chhaganbapa Guest House, Calcutta

The Gujarati Vaishnav Community of Calcutta had organized a week long programme of "Bhagwat Parayana" by Revered Dongre Maharaj. At this function a substantial fund had been collected under the guidance of Revered Chhaganbapa for the construction of Shri Laxminarain Temple in South Calcutta. A specious land of 16000 square feet had been purchased for the purpose. It was about this time that Revered Bapa passed away. Immediately afterwards, an institution named Shri Laxminarain Temple Society was established. The society decided to build an up-to-date guest house as a memorial to Revered Chhaganbapa.

In June 1970 the Vaishnav Community of Calcutta organized another week long programme of "Bhagwat Parayana" by the Revered Dongre Maharaj. On that occasion, on 12th June 1970 the foundation stone of Shri Laxminarain Temple was laid by the leading industrialist of Calcutta, Shri Giridharlal Mehta, and the foundation stone of Late Revered Chhaganbapa Guest House was laid by Shri Rasiklal Worah, in the presence of Shri Dongre Maharaj. This ceremony took place

in the atmosphere of pure joy and to the accompaniment of rituals and recitation of Sanskrit mantras. The Vaishnav Community of Calcutta was present at the occasion in a large number. A fund of Rs. 5 lakhs was collected for Shri Laxminarain Temple and for Guest House. Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad donated a modest sum of Rs. 10,000 for the Guest House Project.

Now the guest house as originally envisaged by Revered Chhaganbapa, is already constructed and many people are taking benefit of its facilities.

APPENDIX II

Letter to Mr. P. D. Dattani
Chhaganlal K. Parekh,
Associate Member,
Servants of India Society.
1st Kulcheri Road,
Killinery Lodge.
Darjeeling.
Dated 16.6.1963.

Dear Mr. Dattani

Received your letter dated 10.5.63 forwarded by you at the Calcutta address. I have caerfully gone through its contents.

I have read your opinion about and analysis of the settlement arrived at in Shri Lohana Mahajan affair. Whatever conceived by leaders should be presumed as correct. I agree with each word written by you. I shall talk with you about the rest when we will meet in person.

I have also received letters from Mr. Devkaranbhai, Mr. Narandas and others. God's will shall prevail.

Although Mahila Griha Udyog might not be required to pay the income tax, it may be asked to pay the sales tax. Such tax-amount would have to be arranged in advance. Whatever is left should

be distributed as labour charges. Do not show any profit. Account books of the previous years also might be required to be produced before authorities. Many problems will arise, if any profit is shown in the books. Therefore the distribution of the profit will have to be shown as the distribution of the labour charges and accounts will have to be written accordingly in consultation with some experts. In rule of this government, trouble can arise even after eight years, please do not put your signature anywhere as secretary. Take this much precaution. Now some solution shall have to be found out of this problem. Henceforth, do not show even single paisa worth of profit. Let the entire income be distributed in form of labour charges. I perceive that some day or other, the institution will be asked to produce the account books before authorities. Please discuss this with Mr. Jayantibhai Thakkar and other tax consultants.

I am here up to the end of June.

Yours etc.

Sd/-

Chhaganlal K. Parekh

APPENDIX III

Letter to Mr. P. D. Dattani
Chhaganlal K. Parekh,
Associate Member,
Servants of India Society.
Dated 20.8.1963

Dear Friend Mr. Dattani,

Received your letter dated 16.8.1963. I was happy to read it. I came to know that you receive receipts from Mr. Ratilal regularly. Ailment of my leg is improving. I shall go to Kutch within 2-3 days. I shall reach Bombay by 29th or 30th August 1963. This programme is convenient to me. Revered Giridharbapa (Heir of Jalarambapa) will come there on 30.8.1963 to collect the fund for Women's College. Mr. Saubhagyachandbhai Rajdev will be coming there two or three days in advance for his personal work. But you don't wait there. Mr. Saubhagyachandbhai will be staying there for 8 to 10 days. It is not possible to do any work to our satisfaction in this short period.

Mr. Devkaranbhai had come to Virpur for Darshan. He has promised to give all possible help.

I was happy to read that your eldest son Narendra is engaged. When will be the wedding

ceremony? I think wedding will take place in the month of Magh. Am I right?

The work of Lijjat Papad must be going on smoothly. 'Nivas' must be buzzing with activity. Everything else is alright. I shall be leaving for Kutch after 2 days.

Your's etc.

Sd/-

Chhaganlal K. Parekh
(With Blessing)

APPENDIX IV

- 1894 : Born on 27th June
- 1912 : In Jharia for business
- 1914 : Marriage
- 1930 : Joined Messrs K. Worah and Company
as a Selling Agent (Later became
a partner).
- 1939 : Resolution and a Written 'Declaration to
start Vanaprastha after 10 years.
- 1947 : To Geneva to attend the International
Labour Convention as a Representative
of Indian Mining Federation and Indian
Coliery Owners' Association.
- 1949 : Retirement from business 'and imple-
mentation of the declaration.
- 1950 : Meeting with Thakkarbappa.
- 1950 : Work with the tribals of Himachal
Pradesh.
- 1950 : Work for the Assam Flood Relief.
- 1951 : Establishment of Gujarat Bhavan of
Haridwar.
- 1952 : Lohana Mahaparishad, Bombay.
- 1954 : Journey to West Africa to mobilise funds
for Educational Schemes.
- 1955 : Lohana Mahaparishad, Rajkot.
- 1956 : Earthquake of Kutch.
- 1968 : Demise. on 14th December.
Eternal peace at the feet of the
Almighty.

APPENDIX V

SERVANTS OF INDIA SOCIETY

Shri G. H. Deshpande,
Secretary (Administration),
Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad.
3, Kamal Apartments, S.V. Road
Bandra (W), BOMBAY-400 050.
Dear Sir,

I have to acknowledge with thanks receipt of your letter Ref. LPB 3303/78-139 dated June, 30, 1978. The delay in replying to it has been due to the search of some old papers.

The Late Shri Chhaganlal Karamshi Parekh was an Associate of the Society. His association with the Society started when he took up relief work in Assam Earthquake in 1950 under the guidance and direction of the Late Shri Thakkar-Bapa, the then Vice-President of the Society. He was "nominated as an Hony. Liaison Officer (at Calcutta) on behalf of Assam Government" and his duty was "to move (by rail, river or air whichever was suitable and convenient) articles and goods which are either purchased from market through us or through Government or received as gift from our country and abroad for relief and rehabilitation purposes."

Shri Chhaganlal Parekh also participated on behalf of the Society in a big way in providing relief to the affected people in Kutch Earthquake and flood relief work in 1959.

He followed in the footsteps of Thakkar Bapa in rushing to the help of people affected by any natural calamity with the same zeal, devotion, disinterestedness and selflessness as Thakkar Bapa's.

I shall be glad to hear from you about the progress of your project.

Yours faithfully,

Sd/-

(R. G. KAKADE)

Secretary

Centres of our Institution

Head Office

Shankar Bari Lane,
J. Shankar Sheth Rd.,
Bombay-400 002.
Ph. : 311556-294939

Mulund

Panch Rasta,
Mulund [West],
Bombay-400 080.
Ph. : 593955-503759

Borivli

M.H.B. Building,
No. 4, Magathana,
Borivli (East),
Bombay-400 066.
Ph. : 663368

Warnanagar

Warnanagar-416 113
Dist. : Kolhapur, [M.]
Ph. : 26

Salaya

Salaya-361 310.
Dist. : Jamnagar, [G.]
Ph. : 27-72

Madras

74, New Avadi Road,
Madras-600 010,
Ph. : 613069

Wadala

78, Rafi Ahmad
Kidwai Road, Wadala,
Bombay-400 031.
Ph. : 476267-472445

Kandivli

Mathuradas Road,
Kandivli [w.],
Bombay-400 067.
Ph. : 694163-696328

Bandra

Opp. Rly. Station,
Bandra [W.],
Bombay-400 050.
Ph. : 531163

Amravati

Pragati, Amba Peth,
Amravati, -444 601.
[Maharashtra State]
Ph. : 3623

Ramania

Ramania-370 415.
Taluka : Mundra,
[Kutch-Gujrat].

Vaktana

Vaktana-394 230.
Via. Sachin, Taluka :
Choryasi, Dist: Surat.
[Gujrat State]

Delhi

111/19, Guru Nanak
Marg, Kewal Park,
Delhi-110 033.
Ph. : 712061

Rajkot

Dhebarbhai Road,
Rajkot-360 002.
Ph. : 8909

Valod

Valod-394 640
Dist: Surat [Gujrat]
Ph. : 33-53-61

Hyderabad

22-2-143, Komati-
wadi, Dabirpura,
Hyderabad-500 024
[A.P.] Ph. : 44829

Calcutta

39-1, Kalighat Road,
Calcutta-700 025.
Ph. : 482036

Poona

33/16 Raj Laxmi
Prabhat Road, No, 4,
Poona-411 004. [M.]
Ph. : 53007.

Lucknow

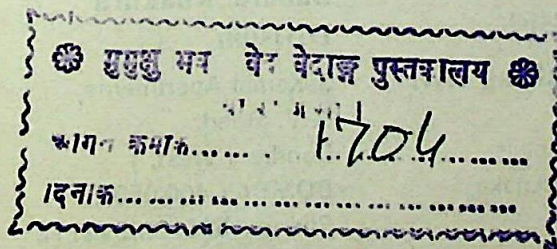
B-155, Mahanagar,
Opp. Boy's H. School,
Lucknow-226 006.
Ph. : 84148

Muzaffarpur

Mehta Estate,
Rambagh Road,
Muzaffarpur-842 002
Ph. : 3468

Bhopal

E-1/87 Arera Colony,
Bhopal 462 014 [MP]



श्री महिला गृह उद्योग लिजट रापड
[Recognised by Khadi & Village Industries Commission]

Head Office

Shankar Bari Lane,
J. Shankarsheth Road,
BOMBAY 400 002.

Central Office

3, Kamal Apartments
S. V. Road, Bandra [W]
BOMBAY-400 050.
Phone : 544112-535163

Masala Division

Milān Industrial Estate,
Jivraj Tokarsi Road,
C o t t o n g r e e n,
BOMBAY-400 033
Phone : 445376

Printing Division

5, 6, 9. Diwali Darshan,
M. G. Road, Borivli (East)
BOMBAY-400 066.
Phone : 663457

Auto Repairing Div.

Plot No 91,
Near Lion Pencils,
Dahisar Checknaka,
Dist. Thane.

**Match Industry
Division**

Near Maruti Temple,
A g a r Road,
DAHANU-401 601
DIST : THANE
Phone : 617

Leather Art Division

M. H. B. Building No. 4.
Magthane, Borivli (East,)
BOMBAY-400 066
Phone : 663368

Agarbatti Division

M. H. B. Building No. 4,
Magthane, Borivli (East,)
BOMBAY-400 066
Phone : 663368

**Bandra Khakhra
Division**

3, Kamal Apartments,
S. V. Road,
Bandra (West,)
BOMBAY-400 050
Phone : 535163-544112

SOME IMPRESSIONS ABOUT CHHAGANBAPA

There have been and there still are, many famous and great men in various spheres of life in this country. However, Chhaganbapa had a unique personality of his own which distinguished him from all others... This uniqueness of his personality lay in the fact that he fulfilled the ideals of public service and personal life, without making any show and without giving up family life and showed to the world how easily one can make one's life worth living in this manner.

SHRI NARENDRABHAI NATHWANI
(Ex-Judge, Bombay High Court)

Chhaganbapa was instrumental in fulfilling many noble tasks. But his personal life was even nobler. The purity of his personal life was so great and influential that it could transform even an impious man into a righteous man through mere association.

My own life is profoundly influenced by Bapa's personality.

SHRI GANGJIBHAI GAJJAR
(Architect, Anjar, Kutch)

KB
157180